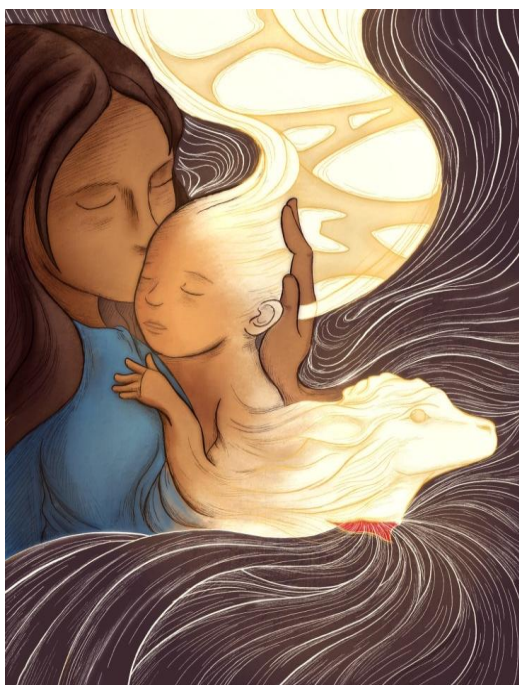


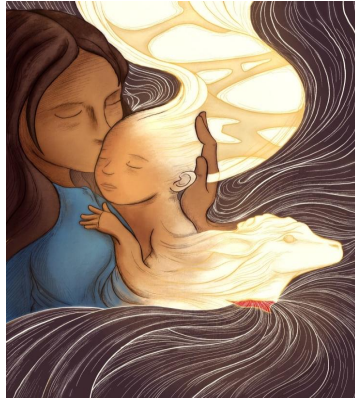
His Birth

in us



Advent messages by R.E. Bieber

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH



***In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the word was God.***

.....And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

That humble birth in a stable, was the beginning of hope.

The time had come for the God of the Universe

To wrap his arms around this tragic race.

To turn on the light in our darkness.

The Living God has entered the heart of our darkness.

He suffers with us.



And when he speaks, a door opens upon a better world:

His Kingdom.

Have you seen its light?

Have you tasted its peace?

What better time than Christmas, to listen to his welcome.

***“Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.”***

Shalom. Sabbath Rest.

Call on his name, Jesus, and he will give you a taste of heaven beginning now.



Prayer: Jesus we call your name...Jesus, Jesus come to us in the midst of this darkness, in the midst of our heartbreak, our loneliness, our despair. Embrace us in your loving arms. Lift us from hopelessness, bring us your peace, your rest for our hurting hearts. Bring us the light we so desperately need. Dwell in our hearts, bring us into your joy so we may experience the heavenly joy the angels sing of. Amen.

Message: 2015

Featured Artist: Courtesy of Chris Powers at Full of Eyes

HIS BIRTH IN US



“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55: 8-11)

When the Eternal Word takes on human flesh..., it prospers in the things to which God sends it, and accomplishes that which he purposes — in ways that are higher than our ways.

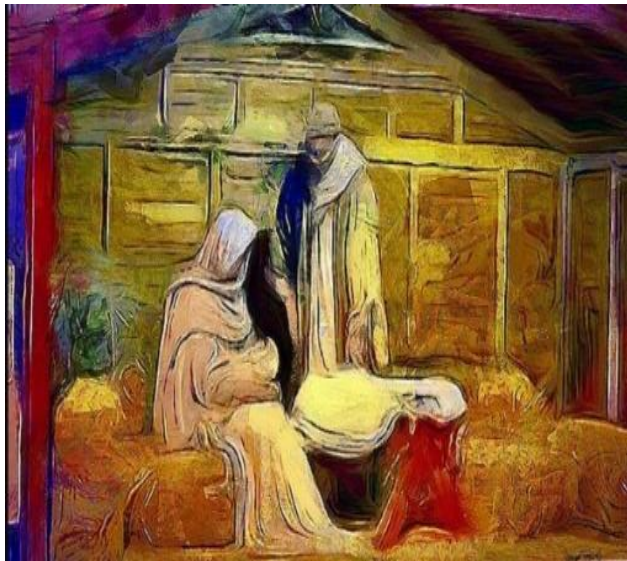
For example, if we were preparing for God to visit this world in visible form — let's say we were put on a "committee" to prepare for his arrival to this planet — surely we would plan it as a reception for a king. We would build him a palace. We'd invite the nations' top leaders to come and welcome God Incarnate to this earth.

There would be special clearance for television crews, reporters, while the world's best-known saints would be given seats of honor for the occasion. If in some way the whole world were convinced that God is about to come, wouldn't there be a scramble! The preparations would make the Olympic games look primitive. Church dignitaries would not be far behind the politicians falling over themselves, rolling out the red carpet.

No wonder it's so hard for us to grasp what happened in Bethlehem!
Because, when God chooses to enter the human race.

He comes in a way directly opposite of anything we could imagine.

He comes, not as a celebrity, but as a baby...a baby born in a cow barn.



This baby grows up and remains poor all his life —

meek, utterly simple.

No king ever invites this man to his palace.

No government ever sends ambassadors to pay their respects.

He heals the sick, casts out demons, feeds the hungry, raises the dead,
speaks words such as no human mouth has ever spoken.

The demons know who he is, the wind and the waves obey him....but no
human being has any conception of who this man is, none, except those
who are poor in spirit.

No man, no woman feels the power of the mighty Word who has become
flesh, except those who are willing to do what he did....

...to become babes.

***For unless you turn and become as children
you will in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.***



In order to enter the kingdom of heaven we have to find the door, Jesus, and we can only find that door when we become poor in spirit, child-like, receptive, teachable.

For us to be able to absorb those high thoughts of God, to truly enter into the ways of the Holy One, we have to do what the Incarnate Word did — *we have to go down*. We have to humble ourselves — empty ourselves of our presumed glory, and become babes.

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

John 14:22-23

If we humble ourselves, love him, trust him enough to keep his Word, this child who was born in Bethlehem

... will be born in us....

....and everything that Jesus is at this moment before the Father in glory...everything he is before the angels in heaven...everything he is before the demons...

... he becomes in us.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulders. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

When we humble ourselves, and love him, trusting him enough to keep his Word....

... this baby is born in us ...



....and the government of our lives is on his shoulders,

and his name ***in us***.... becomes Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Wonderful Counsellor in us:

He makes his home with us, He becomes in us the Wonderful Counsellor.

If a man (or woman) loves me he will keep my word, my father will love him (her), and we will come to him and make our home with him.

(John 14:23b)



He counsels us with the counsel of heaven,

He guides us with wisdom that is not our own,

He leads us in ways that are higher than our ways,

He gives us thoughts that are higher than our thoughts.

Perhaps I'm inclined to do something foolish — to spend money on something I don't need, when my children are going hungry. Or I'm

tempted to do something that gratifies my vanity. Of course, the Wonderful Counsellor in me, checks me — warns me. But I go right ahead and do this foolish thing. Soon the Wonderful Counsellor within me brings me under conviction.

**I find no peace until I repent and come back to him.
Once again, I become child-like, teachable.**

In this way I am guided by the indwelling Christ into ways that are not my own.

Before long his Word coming from my mouth does not return empty but accomplishes that which He purposes and prospers into things in which He sends it.

***but accomplishes what He desires
and achieves the purpose for which He sends it.”***

The Mighty God in us:

When this child is born in us, he lives in us as the Mighty God.

If a man/woman loves me, they will keep my word, and my father will love them and we will come and make our home there.



He makes his home in us as the Mighty God,

so that....

- the might,
- the power,
- the strength that is in him....

.... perfects itself in our weakness.

I am no longer driven by my fear of men, or by anxiety about tomorrow, or by my worry about what is going to happen next.

In a way that is beyond my comprehension....

I am given love, power, and a sound mind....

....For the Mighty God lives in me!

***For God has not given us a spirit of fear
but of love and power and of a sound mind.***

II Timothy 1:7

As the Mighty God begins to move in us, live in us, and direct us....

.....the chains of Satan are broken...

.....the gates of death yield to our advance.

The Word of God in our mouth does not return empty,

***but accomplishes that which He desires
and achieves the purpose for which He sends it.***

The Everlasting Father in us:

When this child is born in us, the Everlasting Father lives in the temple of our bodies.

He makes his home in us as the Everlasting Father. When the Lord dwells in us, the Father dwells in us.

***Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come...***

We're not only asking for the kingdom at the end of the age, we're also asking for the kingdom of God to come and dwell in us now.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When the Everlasting Father is given freedom to move in us.... When we yield to his direction....the lost sheep are brought home, the sick are healed, the discouraged are lifted up...

....by means of the healing that flows through us.



***The Word of God in our mouth does not return empty,
but accomplishes that which He desires
and achieves the purpose for which He sends it.***

When this child is born in us, he lives in us as the Prince of Peace.

The Prince of Peace in us:

He makes his home in us as the Prince of Peace.

***If a man loves me he will keep my word, my father will love him and
we will come and make our home in her... in him.***

He says "Peace, be still!" to that storm raging inside our hearts, and there is calm. Through us, He begins to spread peace to others.

From within us — He rebukes Satan, commands him to leave. Satan the divider of the brethren, the accuser of the brethren — is driven from the assembly, and there is peace.

*The Word of God in our mouth does not return empty,
but accomplishes that which He desires
and achieves the purpose for which He sends it.*

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways
says the lord. But as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my
thoughts higher than your thoughts, and my ways higher than your
ways.*

Yes, to enter into these high ways of the Living God,

We have to go down —

We have to empty ourselves of ourselves.

We have to descend to a place lower than we have ever been.

We have to humble ourselves, and become children before God.



If we love him, trust him enough to act on the light he gives us even as
we read these words...

He will be born in us afresh.

He will live in us....

-as the Wonderful Counsellor,

-as the Mighty God,

-as the Everlasting Father,

-as the Prince of Peace.

And of the increase of His government in us, and of His peace in us there
will be no end.

Open yourself to receiving this Christmas present from God.

Open your heart

— He will give you the best gift of all —



He will give you himself.

And He will live in you as the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Prayer- Lord, you promise us that your word will not return empty. That you will accomplish what you desire and purpose. And you have promised that your Kingdom will be born in us, that you will live in us. May we open ourselves to your love. May we go down, let go, and allow You, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father enter us. May we choose to be guided continuously by you, Wonderful Counsellor. May we still ourselves and allow your peace to permeate us and flow from us, Prince of Peace. And yes, yes, open our hearts so we can receive your most beautiful gift to us, You Lord, Beautiful, Wonderful, You. Amen.

Message: Christmas 1983 [Audio Version](#)

Art: Courtesy of Wayne Pascall at waynepascallart.com

THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS



Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was an island in the middle of the ocean called Penal Island. All the people who lived on this island were prisoners. They had no idea how they got there, but they knew that there was no escape.

The people who lived on this island, like prisoners everywhere, were very unhappy. There was always strife and turmoil as one group fought with another over land, food, water. The prisoners lived in constant fear of one another, and of the future.

Constant fear and a strange hope. Because these imprisoned people still hoped that some day they would find a way to escape to a better place, somewhere out there across the ocean.

In the center of the island, near the main Market Place, was a huge rock, ten stories high and two blocks square. Nobody paid much attention to this rock. It was part of the landscape.

But one day, a door appeared in the side of the rock. On the door, in large gold letters, was the word 'WELCOME!'

The island prisoners stood around looking at the door, and wondering, What does this mean? One man stood up and shouted, *"Stay away from that door! It will only lead to trouble. What else can there be on the other side of that door but a bottomless pit. You step through that door, and you're gone!"*

"No," said another man. *"I believe that this could be the door to the freedom we've been looking for. I'm willing to take a chance."*

While everyone was arguing, a little girl walked up to the door, opened it, stepped inside, closing the door behind her. A hush spread over the crowd as they waited to see what would happen next. Just then a little boy broke free from his mother's grasp, and ran to the door, opened it, and disappeared. His mother came right behind him, stepped in and was seen no more. A few others followed.



So what happened to the people who went through the door?

Were they lost forever? Or did they find something so wonderful that they had no desire to return?

**“Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”.**

The hopes and fears of all the years are focused on this insignificant child in this out-of-the-way town in this despised corner of the earth. Because he is the door which has mysteriously appeared on our prison planet in this vast universe.

For two thousand years people have been standing around trying to decide whether the door is a good thing, a bad thing, nothing at all, or whether, perhaps, this door could be the answer we've been looking for.

Like the prisoners on Penal Island, we too have our fears.

Will tomorrow be safe?
Will I stay healthy?
Who can I really trust?
What's going to happen to me when I die?

And we too carry in our hearts the hope that some day, somehow, we will find our way to something better than this---to a place where there is no more sickness, no more hunger, no violence, death, deceit, pain, tears.

**That hope lives in every one of us.
We were born with it.**

But will it ever be fulfilled?
This child of Bethlehem---the man he has become---

**Is he the answer to our hopes and fears?
Is he the door to the peace our hearts crave?
Or is this just another ritual we go through?**

Christmas is the annual ritual, when we all come together and look at the door, sing about the door, preach about the door. It gives us a good feeling each year to gather in church and sing these beautiful carols.

But nothing happens.... so long as all we do is look at the door.

The deliverance from our fears, the fulfillment of our hopes---

These miracles wait on the other side of the door.

And we will never know what's over there, until we go up to the door, open it, and enter.

Of course, the one whose birth we celebrate this Christmas Eve is....

No longer in a manger.
No longer hanging on a cross.

He is with you now and in a million other places on our prison planet.

He is the Door.



And there is not a soul who will find the door locked against them.

....."Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

John 10:7-9

Long, long ago, on Penal Island, it became an annual ritual. Every year they would decorate the Central Market Place, cover the huge rock with lights and gather around the door, and sing to it. While they were singing carols about the door, it often happened that someone would step out of the crowd, walk up to the door, and enter. Sometimes whole families would enter.

One man stood there singing his heart out, when it suddenly dawned on him, *"I've been doing this all my life. Every year I come here and sing, and every year I go home to the same old dull routine. I think it's time for me to take the step."*

He was a bit nervous about it. He wondered what his friends would think. He wasn't sure what was waiting for him on the other side. But he took a deep breath, walked up to the door, opened it, and entered.

To his amazement, it wasn't dark in there, it was light! A man came up to him and said, "Welcome! Follow me, I'll show you the way." He was led to a banquet table, filled with good things to eat, that stretched as far as the eye could see. Numberless people were feasting and rejoicing. Over at the table was a chair with nobody in it. As he came closer, he discovered his own name on that chair in gold letters. It had been waiting for him all these years! What a welcome he received from the people at that table!

**Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.**

"I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

So this Christmas Eve, don't just look at the Door.
Step up to it and walk in!

Don't just sing carols about Him.

Draw near to him.

Call out to him in your need.

Throw ourselves on his mercy.

*"Lord, here I am. I don't just want to be looking at you.
I want to enter you. I want to walk with you, follow you.
I want you to live in me. I'm yours!"*

Once you're inside the door, you are in another world.



You still breathe this air on earth, but you're in God's world.

And if you walk in the light he gives you, you'll never want to go back to where you were before. Never.

Even now his Spirit speaks to your heart:

"Don't be afraid. Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you. I will lead you into a life more wonderful than you could ask or think, beginning now.

Just open the Door and come in."

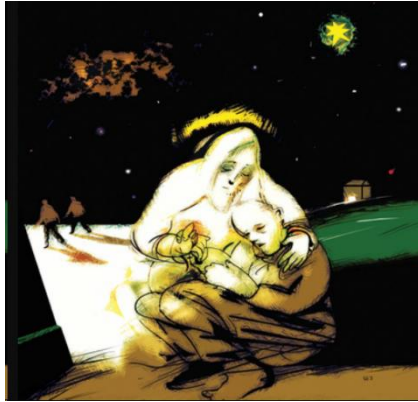


Prayer: Lord, we bring you our fears, our struggles, our loneliness, our despair. We need true deliverance from them, we need hope that there is good for us. We need miracles. We need peace. Help us to find this everlasting light in the dark streets of our souls. Help us to open the door to it. We want to enter, to be wrapped in your light, in your love. We draw near to you now, seeking your welcome. Amen

Message: Christmas 2009

Featured Artist: Courtesy of Ain Vares

A GOOD WORD



***The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.***

Isaiah 50:4a

The Christmas season is the time when in many ways people are more openhearted, more generous, easier to get along with than any other time of the year. But the Christmas season is also the time when people who are hurting hurt much more.

If someone is lonely to begin with, they'll feel lonelier at Christmas. If someone feels left out most of the time, Christmas can be the roughest season of the year. Even when they're invited to dinner by friends and relatives ... they still feel left out.

Most of us have known Christmases when we were among those who hurt. We have known what it's like to be cut off from the rest of the world by that invisible wall. We may have been walking among the pretty lights, the trees, the carols and the best wishes of all our friends. Yet it was as if we were in another world.



But even though we know first-hand what it's like to be inwardly hurting when everyone else seems to be celebrating, and even though we've now tasted some healing from the Lord and have a little peace in our hearts and would like to share it, when someone walks into the room feeling what we once felt, we're often at a loss ... we don't know what to say. Sometimes they're literally begging for a word that will restore their faith.



We try, but it seems that the words that come out of our mouth are lifeless.

***The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.***

"Lord God, how I need such a tongue!"

There is a death in the family of one of our friends and we go to visit them. They take us aside and tell us how discouraged they are. *"Where is God now?"* they ask. We try our best to comfort them ... perhaps we quote a little scripture ... but we know we didn't bring them any help --- like throwing a life ring half way out to them and watching them drown.

A stranger begins to question us about the meaning of life. We want to give him the right answer. *"Lord, here's someone who's crying out for you, but how do I get to them?"* It's like watching a man in a burning building fifteen feet from our own window and ten stories up and having absolutely nothing to put out to him to bring him to safety.

***The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.***

The thing we notice about Jesus is that he had that kind of tongue. He knew how to sustain with a word.... him that is weary.

- He had a word for the sick that healed.
- He had a word for the sinner that brought him to repentance and into the kingdom.
- With a word he lifted the fallen and raised the dead.

"They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. No man ever spoke like this man,"

...Said the officers who had been sent to arrest him but couldn't.

Not only did Jesus speak a word which was always Spirit and life, he promised that those who believe in him would do the same....

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

**Those rivers of living water flowing from the heart...
....come forth from the mouth.**

The mark of the presence of Jesus in our lives is that our speaking, our ordinary conversation, begins to convey the life of God. There is a place for prepared sermons and lessons and carefully thought-out letters we write to our friends, but it's the words that come out of our mouths in the daily round that heal the sick and raise the dead.

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit."

Matthew 12:33

What's he talking about? He's talking about the words that come out of our mouths in daily life.

"You brood of vipers! how can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."

Matthew 12:34-35

If the Spirit of the Lord dwells in us, and if we are walking in the Spirit, surely we can expect that the fruit of our lips will be a good word at home, *especially at home* ... on the job ... among strangers... among friends a good word!

Now a good word has nothing to do with eloquence. Nor is it a matter of learning or skill. A good word from God coming out of our mouths is the inevitable result of a good word from God filling our hearts.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 52:7

And who is able to bring good tidings and publish peace and publish salvation and say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" but the person whose own heart is saturated with the goodness of God! How can I say with authority to anybody, that God lives and that God is good, unless he lives in me and unless his goodness is cleansing and taking possession of my own heart?

No doubt the best Christmas present we can give to anybody....

... is a good word.

A word that will really encourage and give hope and lead to faith.



We're not talking about words without deeds, words of love need to come with deeds of love, with a loving heart.

To the hungry we need to give bread, and to the thirsty something to drink. But on top of the best deeds we can ever perform there needs to be a life-giving word.

What a change will come over our family life --- especially our family life – our work life, when good fruit starts coming out of our mouth consistently!

Four things to keep in mind if we want to sustain the weary.

1. We need to ask God for a good word.
2. We need to receive those good words from God
3. Good words need to flow from an attitude of goodwill.
4. Leave the results in God's hands

1. A good word for others is something we need to ask God for.

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'?" (Luke 11:5-8)

What is this bread he begs for at midnight?

A good word to speak to this friend who comes on a journey.

"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail, the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

John 6:63

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:13

And why does he give us the Spirit?

So that we can give a good word.

We are encouraged in this parable to ask the heavenly Father for a living word to give to the weary traveler who has come to us. *"Lord God, I won't leave your door until you give me that good word, which is the Holy Spirit."*

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

....they asked for power to speak a good word and they received.

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

Acts 4:29-30 & 31

2. A good word for others is something we need to receive from God.

The man who went to his friend at midnight not only pounded on the door and made lots of noise, he waited expectantly. He opened his heart ... he knew it would come.

Don't just stand around and wish that God would give you something good to say, know that he will. You asked, you will receive. Open your heart and know that he will give you the tongue of one who is taught so that you will know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.

"Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over ... and out of my heart will come rivers of living water."



3. Once God has given us a good word for others, it's freshness and it's power and it's freedom to flow out will depend on our day-in-and day out attitude.

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of, David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

(Luke 2:10-11)

You can be sure that the attitude of that angel was good will. What man or angel can carry a message of good will without an attitude of good will?

- If our attitude is good will, the good word will always come forth when it's needed.
- If our attitude is sour, how can we expect a good word to come forth? How can a sour will.... give forth sweet water?

4. When we speak a good word we are never to worry about the results ... the results belong to God.

We can be sure that every heart that receives the good word will have it confirmed.

A good word spoken in the name of the Lord is like a seed which we plant in the ground.

We plant it and leave it.

It will grow by itself without any help from us.

- We don't have to call them up the next day to see if they were impressed with what we said.
- We don't have to follow them around to make sure they've taken our advice.
- We leave the seed to the soil where it was planted.

If the seed is receptive it will grow in its time.



*The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.*

God help us to take this promise of the Spirit into our hearts.

**May God send us forth with a good word
....for the lives we touch in the coming days.**



Prayer: Yes Lord, send us forth with a good word today and in the coming days. There is such need, such sorrow, such loneliness, such despair. We don't have what it takes to lift those who suffer so deeply. There are no words that come from human lips that can rescue the suffering experienced, especially during the holidays. We admit our helplessness. There is no way we can bring a healing word, a healing touch without your Spirit. So, help us Lord, we beg you, give us a good word. Give us tongues that are taught so we can sustain with a word those who are weary. Help us to find such joy in you... that we become so saturated with your goodness that good words can't help but flow out of our mouths. And may we turn from the day to day negative, critical attitudes that sour the sweet words you do put into our mouths. Light us with the fire of Heaven, send Living water from our mouths as we speak your word with boldness so you may bring healing...and that those in despair may be brought pure joy... through the name of Jesus. Amen.

Message: Christmas 1980

Featured Art: Rolf Jansson via Good Salt License

HE SHALL STAND AND FEED HIS FLOCK



You pick up the newspaper and they tell you that there are only a few more shopping days left. So get crackin! You check over the headlines and are reminded that, Christmas or no Christmas, things are looking pretty shaking out there. Bombs going off in crowded cities, refugee camps filling up. And, close to home, the economy is shaky, prices going up and up.

So when we get to Christmas Eve and sing, "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come," are we ignoring the real world for a journey down memory lane, or is there something in the gospel of Jesus which applies even to this messy, troubled world as it is right now?

Is it possible to see something in this gospel that will justify our singing, "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come"?

Back in the days of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, there was a man named Micah, who was not only gifted with a prophetic voice, he had prophetic eyes. Every once-in-a-while God enabled Micah to see far into the future. And Micah took what he saw and used it to create hope.

Hope, at a time when things were looking bleak, in Israel, and in the world.

But you, O Bethlehem, who are little among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.....And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

Micah 5:2,4



Micah sees a time when this world will be at peace.

No more war.

No terror.

No hunger and disease.

A ruler "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days (eternity?).....

... will stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."

Micah sees a day when God's will **will** be done on earth as it is in heaven, under the rule of the Messiah.

As we look forward to another Christmas, we need to see that the arrival of this baby in Bethlehem was only the beginning of the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. There's more.

All we can see right now as we look around at our world, is a world so out-of-control that no king, no president, no dictator, no "international conference" can set it right. Only God can do that.

So as we celebrate the birth of this baby at a time like the one we're living in, it is important to see the whole picture:

.... That we celebrate, not only what Jesus has already done, but what he is doing now, and, more important, what he is going to do.

Ever since Jesus rose from the dead he has been doing one thing here in this world: he has been gathering his flock. He is preparing for the day when he will "stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God," in a world at peace.

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

John 10: 16 & 27



Across the earth today, the Spirit of the Lord is calling people out of their preoccupations to come into his flock. He is gathering his sheep.

The Lord Jesus gathers his sheep in two ways:

- 1. He causes us to hear his voice;**
- 2. He enables us to feel his power.**

He gathers his sheep in no other way.

Sometimes our churches hinder what the Lord is doing by trying to help him gather his flock by other means. We try to fill our churches by entertaining the folks. Or we bribe them with promises of earthly prosperity. We even do market surveys to find out what the people want; and then we *give* them what they want.

Of course, we end up with numbers.

But no vision. No life.

We end up with a flock. But it's *our* flock, not his.

If we step back and let the Lord Jesus do it his way, he will gather his flock even in the smallest of gatherings.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Matthew 18



If we are truly gathered in his name, and if he really is in our midst at this moment, the Lord Jesus will make his presence known to us the way he always does it:

1. He will cause us to hear his voice.

2. He will enable us to feel his power.

First, the Lord Jesus causes us to hear his voice.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.

As we gather, as we pray, a word comes to us. It could be from a hymn, something someone says, a thought that comes into your mind. It's a word that cuts right into your heart. That word is a call to make a change....to get reconciled with someone....perhaps simply to have faith, "Trust me, don't give up. I'm with you." Maybe it's a call to repent of a negative attitude. A word... a living word!

Secondly, if we act on that word, the Lord Jesus then enables us to feel his power.

The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live.

John 5

Jesus is not talking about those who are dead in their graves. He's talking about people like ourselves, when we're distracted, preoccupied with ourselves, burning with resentment, driven by fear --- **spiritually dead.** He causes us to hear his voice.

If we perk up our ears and pay attention, and act on his word, we begin to feel his power. He raises us from our spiritual death.

His power may come to us as a touch of healing, or a rush of peace flooding our mind, a flash of insight that strikes like a bolt of lightning and turns us around. One way or another, we will feel his power, if we act on his word, because the Lord is gathering his flock, lifting us out of our worries, our troubles, our petty concerns, into the light of his kingdom.

He is doing this to give us a sample of the glory which will one day cover this earth. But the blessing we receive today as we call on his name is only the beginning. If we are touched with the life of heaven today, it is only a foretaste.



He is trying to get us to look beyond the troubles of the earth at this hour and see what Micah saw: the Day when....

***He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.***

That's why he came.

That's why he died on the cross.

That's why he is among us now.

To get us ready....

....Ready for the Day when wars and rumors of wars, pandemics, famines, earthquakes, and strife will end. This world will be at peace.

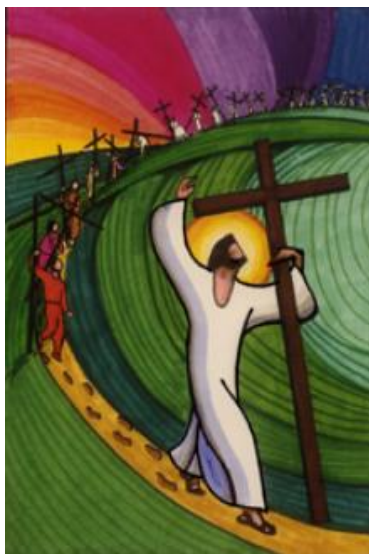
And all who answered his invitation to walk the walk of faith will join him in his New Creation on this earth. Those who belong to him on the other side of death will come with him. Those who are scattered in the far reaches of this planet will be drawn to him.

And there will be one Flock, one Shepherd.

***And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.***

This is what justifies our singing "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come!" Only this. Meanwhile, today as we read this message, this is his word to us: (If it applies to you, you will know it.)

***My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me,
and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and
no one shall snatch them out of my hand.***



Prayer: Yes Lord, during this holiday season, especially, may we be fed by you, our loving shepherd. May we lift our voices in beautiful song and truly mean "joy to the world, the Lord has come". May we experience your presence now as we hear your voice and feel your power. Give us Living Words. Raise us from our spiritual deaths. Lift us into your Kingdom, where we can be freed from the troubles of this world, now. Because you, yourself have fed us, you feed us now, and you will continue to feed us as we join you in your new creation. Amen.

Message: December 2009

Featured Art: By Francisco Borboa (Pancho) a Mexican national born in 1923 who lives in Taiwan. He was formerly a priest, has painted many murals, and has lived a long and very interesting life. No website.

MIDNIGHT VISION



*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, upon them has the
light shined.*

Isaiah 9:2

Those shepherds were lucky.
They saw something!

There they were, out in the fields, watching over their flocks; it was quite dark. Suddenly there comes this great light! And in the light, a messenger from God, who brings them a word from God, who speaks to them; so that by the time they find the baby in Bethlehem, they know that they are looking at glory.

Those wise men were lucky.
They saw something!

They saw a bright, bright star, caused by the lining up of who knows how many stars, and they understood that it meant the birth of a king

Isaiah the prophet was lucky. Centuries before, he told us it would happen

He had his eyes opened! He went into the temple one day to worship God, and suddenly he was overwhelmed by blinding light! And there, before his eyes, was the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up! And from that day, Isaiah saw things which the natural eye cannot see.

So, what do we see? Christmas tree lights, candles. It's all very pretty, but hardly enough to inspire us to spend the rest of our days as a living sacrifice.

And yet, the whole point of this child's birth was to make it possible for us to see something, to open **our** eyes.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

“To us a child is born; to us a son is given”

and not only shall the government be upon his shoulder, not only shall his name be called

“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace”...

He comes to open our eyes—to give us vision.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world, he was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed on his name, he gave power to become sons of God, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:9

To be born of God begins with having your eyes opened.

It begins with vision.

Again Jesus spoke to them saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

Jesus says, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see, may see, and that those who see, may become blind." John 9:39

He comes to open our eyes, so that we can see glory, and in the light of that glory, can spend the rest of our days serving the purpose of the kingdom of God.

Most of us reading these words are believers. We've committed our lives to Jesus. We can point to miraculous changes which have occurred in our lives since we made that commitment.

But most of us are still short on vision.

God longs to give us vision. To open our eyes, so that we can see Jesus so clearly, know him so truly, that all the vagueness, and hesitancy, and compromise, is swallowed up in a consuming confidence in him. The word of the Lord to the body of Christ at this hour is "I have come to open your eyes. I have come to give you vision."

And if we will respond to that word, with our lives, we will see what the shepherds saw, what the wise men saw, what Mary saw, what Isaiah saw.



There are four things we need to know about the vision that God will give us---a vision beyond any we've had so far.

- 1. The vision comes to us at midnight.**
- 2. The vision brings us under a word from God.**
- 3. The vision offers to cleanse us from our sin.**
- 4. The vision puts us under a prophetic calling.**

First of all, the vision comes to us at midnight,
at a time when all other light becomes darkness.

*And in those days there went out a decree from
Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled.*

And who was Caesar Augustus? He was a world dictator. You think things are bad now? Hang on! The Alpha period and the Omega period are going to match. This man was a world dictator. He was a forerunner of the anti-Christ. Things were dark in Israel in those days. And into the midst of that darkness came light. The shepherds were out there in the field, surrounded by darkness. They were without any light of their own: no flashlight, no gas lanterns, no matches. They were watching over the flock, when, all of a sudden, into this darkness came light!



"In the year King Uzziah died", says Isaiah, "I saw the Lord."

And what was the year King Uzziah died? It was a dark year, a bad year, a terrible year. And into this bad time, this dark time, comes blazing light. It's the same for us.

Vision is always preceded by darkness. First it gets dark. Dark, like the valleys we've been walking through. Dark, like the judgment of God we're seeing in our own lives, in the body of Christ, in the world around us.

Midnight means judgment.

Midnight means that God starts calling in accounts.

"And at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold the bridegroom. Go out and meet him.' And all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps, and those who had oil, those who had light, those who had vision, went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut."

Don't be surprised, and don't be or discouraged by the darkness you've been walking through. It's midnight! It's judgment time. God is calling us to account. But the people who walked in darkness, and who remained faithful, and who kept seeking those lost, and kept doing the will of God, who lived with integrity before God, who did not compromise---to them came light.

Our light is coming!

Secondly, the vision brings us under a word from God.

When the shepherds saw the light, they also heard a word.

***Behold I bring you good news of great joy,
which shall be to all people.***

When the people who dwelled in darkness saw the light, they also heard a living word.

***To us a child is born, to us a son is given...
the government shall be upon his shoulders.***

When Isaiah saw the light in the temple, he heard a word. He saw these magnificent creations of God proclaiming to each other,

***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.
The whole earth is full of his glory.***

Prior to that moment, Isaiah had seen no glory. He had seen nothing but trouble and despair. He had seen injustice and absurdity.

But now, in the midst of darkness, he begins to see the glory of God, because he's receiving a word from God.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain; and he is transfigured before them. His face begins to shine as the sun. His raiment becomes white as light, in preparation for the things they're going to have to go through soon after this. And with that light comes a word.

***This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.
Listen to him!***

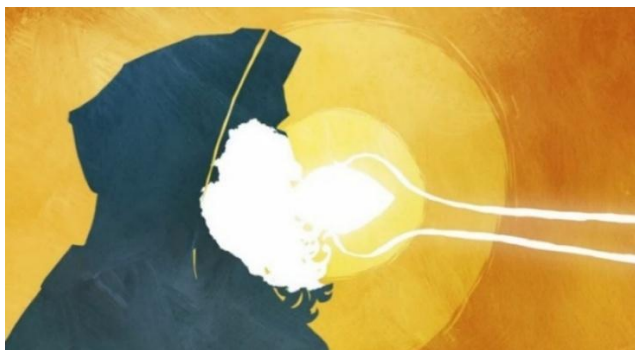
Whenever God opens our eyes, he also opens our ears. Whenever we receive vision, we also receive a word. That word is closer to you now than your own breath.

Thirdly, the vision offers us cleansing from our sins.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. And his train filled the temple, and I said, "Woe is me for I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and he said, "Behold this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

Until Isaiah receives this vision, he has no idea how much sin is dragging him down, how much self-deceit, how much compromise, how many attitudes, are holding him back. But now he sees the light, and in that light, he becomes aware of his own uncleanness.

"Woe is me, I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. What's going to happen to me?" Then the seraph brings a burning coal from the altar, touches his mouth and says, "Lo, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is removed; your sin is forgiven."



That burning coal is a symbol of the blood of the Lamb to be shed one day at Jesus' baptism of fire.

Likewise, when we see light, we discover our own uncleanness.

We start to see things in us that we didn't see before. Psalm 51 is no longer just David's psalm; it's ours.

We too, begin to cry, "Purge me with the hyssop, and I shall be clean! wash me and I shall be whiter than snow! Create in me a clean heart, O God!" "O Lord, forgive me! O Lord, cleanse me! O lord, straighten my crookedness!"

Now I'm no longer obsessed about everybody else's sin;

I see mine, and I'm terrified, and I cry out, And the Lord forgives.

Finally, the vision puts us under a prophetic calling.

After they heard all this, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger, and when they saw it, they made known the saying that was told them concerning this child, and all who heard it, wondered at what the shepherds had told them.



The shepherds couldn't keep quiet. They couldn't contain themselves; they had to talk about it.

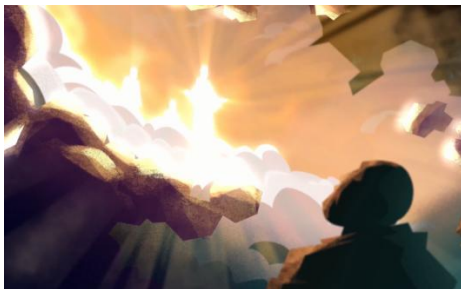
This was a beginning of prophetic utterance for them.

Vision always leads to prophecy.

After his sins are cleansed, Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And Isaiah, to his own surprise, finds himself saying, "Here am I. Send me." And the Lord says, "Go."

Very soon, the light that we receive will become a prophetic word going out from us, a prophetic life lived by us; a word from God, a life lived, that becomes a message from God, not only from our mouths, but from our very lives.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelled in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.



Look for four things in your life, and keep watching for them in the coming days.

First, look for signs of midnight---in world events, in your own circumstances, in the atmosphere of the city where you live. But also expect light from God to come visit your darkness. Expect God to give you great light. He will.

Secondly, look for a word from God, clearer than you've ever heard it. I'm not talking about hearing voices. I'm talking about hearing God. It may be that the scriptures open up and begin speaking to you. You'll be reading something you've read many times, and suddenly it comes to life. It may be that you hear God speaking through a sister or a brother. In some way, you will begin to hear a word, that will be Spirit and Life for the Body of Christ, including you.

Thirdly, look for a time of personal cleansing. Expect God to put his finger on areas in your life that need attention: areas of compromise, or self-deceit, attitudes that you weren't even aware of. And as you confess the sin, and as the Lamb washes away the guilt with his blood, you will experience a new freedom---and with that freedom, holy joy.

Finally, look for a clarifying of your own prophetic calling. Wait for that word which came to Isaiah: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" When you answer "Here am I; Send me," He will make it clear.

***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
Those who dwelled in the land of deep darkness,
upon them has the light shined.***



**We have seen that light.
We are going to see it more clearly as the days pass.**

For unto 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. And of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end.

**We are his government.
We are agents of his holy peace.**

It is his zeal, burning in our hearts, which will prepare the way for his glorious Kingdom which is soon to burst upon the darkness of this troubled earth.

Prayer- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, in the midst of midnight, in the midst of this darkness, shine your light upon us. Open our eyes so that we can see your glory and serve you with great joy. Open our ears so that we can hear a word that brings life to us and to others. Touch us with the burning coal of redemption. Wash us, forgive us, change us so we can live in your presence, in freedom, in holy joy. May the vision of how glorious you are cause our hearts to cry out... "Here we are, send us." And yes, make us agents of your holy peace with a zeal for you burning so brightly that it breaks into the darkness of the troubled world around us. Amen.

Message REB 1986 [Audio Version](#)

Featured Art: Stills from the Bible Project video Luke and Sarah-Rebecca (Sai)

FINDING OUR IDENTITY... BY LOSING IT



My soul magnifies the Lord.

The words of Mary in what is known as The Magnificat is probably one of the clearest expressions in Scripture of how Grace is always clothed in lowliness.

***"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my
Saviour,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden."
Luke 1***

Unless the Lord returns, in the meantime, there will come a moment in each of our lives, when it will be time to leave this world: As we stand on the threshold of the world beyond, all distractions will fade into oblivion, and one question will rise up in our consciousness demanding an answer.

We will **not** ask,

"Did I have a nice time while I was here?"

"Will my friends miss me?"

"Will I have a big funeral?"

"Who's going to get my money (if there is any) ?" ...

"Will I be remembered?"

The one question which will drive every other question out of our minds will be:

"Did I fulfill my purpose, accomplishing what God put me here to do?"

Nor will this question strike us as a new thought. We will realize, as never before, that this question was with us from the day of our birth. We spend years of our lives distracted by a million empty pursuits, and rarely give a second thought to the essential issue.

But the question lingers in our souls, like our heart's continuous beating:

"Am I fulfilling my purpose, getting done what I am here to do?"

Most of us, instead of seeking the answer to that question, try to find our 'identity', not in the call of God, but where we think we stand in the eyes of other people. If somehow, we can impress them with who we are, or what we accomplish, or how much we have, then we think we have worth. If nobody is impressed, then we suspect we have no worth.

Hence, the professional athlete, the actor, the senator, the millionaire, the PhD, the nuclear physicist, all have worth. They made something of themselves. They achieved their goal.

And we, with our lesser talents, though we may not weigh as much on that scale, take the same route. We find our identity in terms of what we've achieved, or what we have, or what kind of dent we've made in "history".

When you follow the latest news to see who is making an impact on this world, you hear about revolutionaries, dictators, actors, giants in the realm of sports, music and art. Perhaps some troubled soul who beat his father to death with an axe. Follow up on those people five years later and you will see that the great ones, the rich ones, the powerful ones, are

more victims of the flow of history than the movers and shakers they appeared to be when they were trending.

As long as we try to find our identity in what kind of dent we can make in history ... even if it's a little teeny dent ... we're going to stumble along with an ego problem all our days. How can you make a dent in history, when history is like quicksand? "Well, at least I'm going to put down this board, so people can walk over it to safety." ... Twenty minutes later that board is swallowed up in the quicksand.

Mary told us a long time ago that the destiny of this world is not in the hands of the rich and the powerful and the great, but in the hands of the Living God, who affects change and brings nations to judgment by means of people who in their generation are always numbered among the meek and inconsequential.

If we want to find out who we are, there is no better place in all of Scripture than to turn to these words spoken by Mary. Mary is pregnant. She's making for the hills. She's on her way to be with her kinswoman Elizabeth, who, much past child bearing age, is also pregnant.

They greet each other under the anointing of the Spirit. Mary's greeting becomes a prophecy, inspired by the same Spirit who inspired Hannah, the mother of Samuel, centuries before:



***"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.***

***For behold, henceforth, all generations will regard me blessed,
for he who is mighty has done great things for me—and holy is his name.***

And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.

***He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low
degree.***

***He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent Empty
away.***

***He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy as he
spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity, his seed forever.***

Mary is telling us how she knows who she is, and how we can know who
we are.

"Am I fulfilling my purpose, accomplishing what I was put here to do?"

My purpose, along with all of creation, is to magnify God.

Magnify God with my soul.

Magnify God with my body.

Magnify God with my Spirit.

When I magnify God with my soul, and with my body, and with my
spirit, God will use me, along with countless others, to redeem the earth
and make it new again.

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

Mary is not magnifying Mary...Or rejoicing in Mary...But in God!

What peace comes into our lives when we turn from incessantly
magnifying ourselves---to magnifying God! We magnify ourselves, not
only by exalting ourselves, but also by sitting around feeling sorry for
ourselves and blaming everybody around us for our misery. We magnify
God when we turn our attention away from the mess, which is our 'self',
and fix it on Him.

We magnify God *with our soul* when, with an act of will, we turn to God
and worship Him—waking and sleeping, day and night—inwardly
worshiping Him...praising Him...adoring Him...serving Him...loving
Him...thinking about Him...rejoicing in Him.

"My soul magnifies the Lord!"

We magnify God with our body when we present our body as a living sacrifice to Him--- as Mary presented her body, a living sacrifice to God. From that moment she carried in her body the life of God, her body was used, spent, given, and poured out to fulfill God's purpose.



When we present *our bodies*, our physical bodies, to God as a living sacrifice, the same thing happens. He fills them with the life of His Son. And now we spend, pour out our physical strength in His worship, and in His service.

***"Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.
Let it be to me according to your word."***

We magnify God with *our Spirits* when we accept a place of low estate in this world.

"For He that is mighty hath done great things for me."

And He does great things for us when we are willing to be lowly in this world, then He is able to do great things, things that may not look great to the world at the moment, but will one day be confirmed as great because they magnify Him.

"He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts; He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted them of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away."

The shattering changes which are taking place on this earth are being accomplished by God through people who are of low estate. The best example of how this works is found in our Lord. This baby carried in Mary's body was a king, and yet from the day of His birth until the day of His death, and even to His resurrection down to this moment, He is of low estate.

He's a nobody—He doesn't count as far as the world is concerned.

How does the world look at Him?

***"Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?***

***For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;***

***he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.***

***He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and
acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces.***

He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains..."

Isaiah 53



He was born of Mary, and he grew up as a root out of dry ground. He was not appealing. It is significant that there is nothing said about Jesus except that brief incident in the temple – nothing--- until the age of thirty, He began His ministry. He was almost like a piece of furniture... "Jesus? yeah, sure...Joseph and Mary's son." He walked around Nazareth like an inconsequential shadow.

When Jesus began His ministry, He had nothing that the world considered of value. Of course He healed the sick, raised the dead, laid down His life as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, rose from the dead, and is now Kings of kings and Lord of lords. But to this day He is still despised and rejected by the world, and hardly of much account, beyond lip-service, to the "Christian world".

And those who follow Jesus share his lot.

They too are despised and rejected.

You can talk about God all you like, have faith in God all you like, but when you begin to follow Jesus, when you begin to confess Jesus before the world, you quickly experience how the world despises and rejects Him, and those who belong to Him.

In the world we find our identity by looking into the eyes of other people, to see if there is some admiration coming back to us.

In the kingdom, we find our identity by losing it in God.



If I am willing to be of low estate, then God can use me for His redemptive purpose on earth.

If I am willing that my name should be hidden in God, then God can use me as a voice crying in the wilderness, pointing to the Lamb.

And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden."

One day, barring the return of the Messiah, each of us will take leave of this world. As we stand on the threshold of the world beyond, all distractions will fade into oblivion. One question will rise up in our consciousness, and demand an answer.

The question that will drive all other questions out of our minds will be:

"Did I fulfill my purpose, getting done what God put me here to do?"

And my purpose is to magnify God with my soul, with my body, with my spirit.

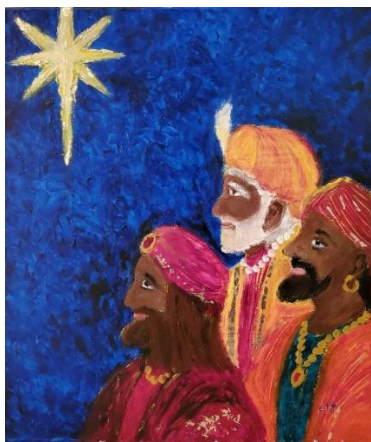
**May God use my low estate as the means
by which He does mighty things.**



Prayer: Lord, may we willingly lose our identity in you. Forgive us for trying to find our identity in achievements, in what others think of us, and in empty pursuits and pleasures. Rescue us from these mindsets and behaviors. Instead, may we love you so much that we do fulfill any purpose you have for us in this life, that you can use our low estate to do mighty things in your eyes, even if it means being despised and rejected by men, Oh Lord, may pleasing you, magnifying you with our bodies, souls, and spirits be our greatest pursuit. And may magnifying you bring us great joy and be our song, our lifeblood, and our identity to the end of our days. Amen.

Message: Christmas Eve 1980 aka Identity [Audio Version](#)
Featured Art: Courtesy of Maria Lang Garcia

SEEING THE LIGHT



The wise men saw a star.

Everybody could see that star **if** they knew where to look.

It was probably a cluster of stars lined up close to each other.

It wasn't like the star you see on the Christmas cards.

It was a star among millions.

But these Gentile astrologers knew what it meant.

It meant the Jews had a new king.

The Messiah was born.

"It's the beginning of a new era", they said.

"We must go and worship him."

How come those Gentile astrologers understood the meaning of that star while nobody else did?

No doubt these wise men were really smart, but it wasn't their smarts that helped them here.

No doubt they had studied the stars for years with their charts of the heavens -- they knew how to read events in the stars. But it wasn't this knowledge that helped them here.

If you were to ask these men how they knew that that bright star in the east meant the Jewish Messiah, they'd tell you they weren't just studying astrology all these years, they were seeking for something beyond the heavens.

They could see what others could not because their eyes had been opened by God.

There is such a thing as "seeing the light". "He saw the light", we say almost jokingly of some ruined man who's finally figured out how to stay sober, after wasting years of his life on skid row .But if we took the trouble to get to know this man, we'd discover that's exactly what happened to him.

This guy got a glimpse at what the wise men saw. He saw the light and it changed his life.

Only God knows our hearts. We can't judge each other.

But it's a simple fact that in most of our churches - some people see the light and others don't.

Once you see the light, there's no way you can be casual about it.

It gets hold of you.

It moves you and shakes you.

Even if you try to push it aside and turn your back on it, it haunts you until you get on your camel, so to speak, like those wise men and start riding toward the light.

On the other hand, if you don't see the light, then this is just "church" or "Christianity".

It's a nice thing to do, it's a nice thing to believe, but no big deal. "I'll go if I feel like it and if I don't, I won't."

And really, why should you get excited if spiritually all you see in front of you is a gray mist.

So what is it that causes some people to see the light while others see nothing?

How come the wise men saw it and the scholars of Israel didn't?

Some time later there was this man, Nicodemus. He was impressed by the things Jesus was saying and doing. He knew God was at work in this prophet from Nazareth. But he still couldn't figure it out.

So, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night searching for answers. And Jesus told him the one thing he needed to know.



“Unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:33

“If you want to see who I am and what I’m about, you’ve got to get a new set of eyes, and you’ll only have these new eyes when God’s Spirit is living inside you.”

Now there are those who claim that some people are predestined to have vision while others are not. “The Spirit opens some eyes and leaves others to stumble around in their blindness.” In other words, “If you can’t see the light, it just means that you’re not one of the elect. Too bad for you!”

No -- just as surely as God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, he desires that all should have eyes to see.

God doesn’t want a single one of us left out.

That’s why the child was born: to give us eyes.

*“I have come as light into the world that
whoever believe in me may not remain in darkness.”*

John 12:46

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind.” --*

Luke 4:18

-- To give us eyes!

His Spirit is among us now to give us eyes.

But whether it’s the wise men, Nicodemus, or you or I...

There are four things we have to do if we want God to open our eyes -- and give us light.

If we want light, we’re going to have to;

- 1. Ask for it**
- 2. Believe for it**
- 3. Pursue it**
- 4. Walk in it.**

Now if you're satisfied with things as they are, go ahead and be satisfied.

But if you want light from God....

1. Ask for it

You have to ask for it. You're going to have to ask God to open your eyes. "Fill me with your Spirit, Lord, so I can see!" And even after you get the light, you never stop praying that prayer.

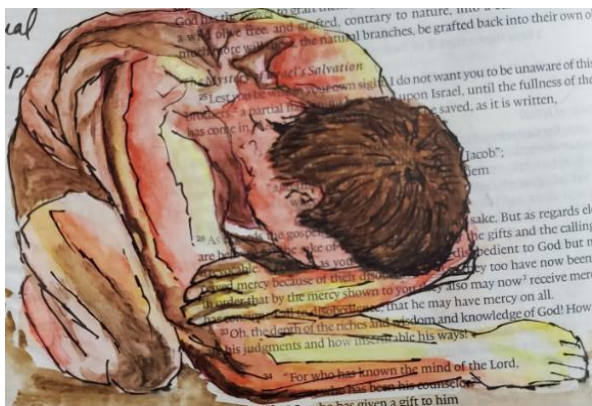
That's what Nicodemus was doing. His heart was crying out for light until he stumbled through the darkness to Jesus. "You need the Spirit", says Jesus. Pretty soon, we see Nicodemus walking with new eyes. Because he asked!

Nobody gets turned away.

Everybody who asks receives.

***"If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13)***

You want light? Ask for it. And keep asking until you know you mean it.



2. Believe it

If you want light, believe it. Believe that God will keep his word to you.

He promised that if you ask for the Holy Spirit, you'll receive the Spirit.



If there is the slightest crack of humility in your soul, the Spirit of God will come to you and open your eyes.

Believe it!

Don't go by your feelings.

Don't be waiting for bells to ring and whistles to blow.

Just believe that **God keeps his word** and pretty soon your eyes will open.

The confirmation that you have received what you asked for is that you will begin to see the glory of God right in the midst of the darkness of this world --

-- just like that star.

You will see the presence of the Son of God scattering the darkness of your own heart --

-- just like that star.

Now you're beginning to see the light.

3. Pursue it

Pursue the light! The wise men didn't just sit around and admire the star, they went where it told them to go. For the light they were looking for wasn't hanging out there in space --

-- it was right here on earth, waiting for them in Bethlehem, and they pursued it.

The real light was not the star, but that child.



The apostle Paul never stopped pursuing the light. "I know Jesus now", says Paul, "but I need to know him better. I need to know him in the power of his resurrection, in the fellowship of his sufferings -- becoming like him in his death." So Paul presses on.

We need to do the same. There's always more ahead. Once we have the light we keep pressing on for more. And we get more.

"To him who has will more be given. And from him who has not, even that which he has will be taken away."

There is no such thing as standing still in this business. You're either moving toward the light and getting closer all the time or you're sinking back into the darkness.

4. Walk in it.

Once you have the light, walk in it.

The Spirit of the Lord is showing you the way.

A step of faith he wants you to take.

A change of attitude.



And now it's a matter of doing it.

Don't think about it. Don't talk about it -- do it!

Walk in the light.

Maybe there's somebody you need to get right with.

Maybe you need to stop looking at everybody with a critical eye.

Maybe there's a habit that needs to change.

God's light is power.

You can do this thing now. Just take that step.

“This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”
(1 John 1:5-9)

Jesus came to give us eyes to see the light.

He came to be our light and guide us away from the darkness.

But ask for it, believe it, pursue it, and walk it!

The glory of God is already here right in the middle of all this darkness



-- just like that star -- for those who have eyes to see.

Prayer- Holy Lord, like the wisemen may we see and seek your light. Open our eyes and fill us with your Spirit so we can truly see your perfect beauty. Strengthen our belief that we will find you, that we will dwell in your presence, and yes, that your presence will scatter the darkness within us. Lord, give us an overwhelming need to keep pursuing you, to keep pressing in for more of you. And Lord, may we faithfully continue to walk in the light, to choose your ways over the ways of darkness and in that may we see your glory, live in your holy power wherever you lead us. Amen.

Message: 2004

Featured Artist: Courtesy and kindness of Suki at sukisfineart.com

HEAVENLY TREASURE-EARTHEN VESSELS



Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet:

‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-11

The wise men brought treasure, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But they also came seeking treasure, heavenly treasure. They traveled an awesome distance and at tremendous expense to them, to find this treasure. Now as they look into the manger, tears streamed down their ancient faces. For they saw in this infant what almost nobody else could see. They saw heavenly treasure contained in a tiny fragile, earthen vessel.



And as they worshiped this treasure, which was contained in this ordinary thing, this baby, they saw glory coming from his face, not with the natural eye, but with another kind of eye. And as they saw this and worshiped, the glory that was in this baby flowed into their hearts like a river of healing light.

They went on their way rejoicing because in a mystery, the glory which had been in this child, and is in this child, had come in and touched and changed their lives. They went back to their homeland to spend the few remaining years that they had on this earth to prepare the way for the Messiah in the East.

About 30 years later, this baby, now a man, spoke these words.

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field.

Matthew 13:44

The treasure is always hidden in the field, always wrapped in an earthen vessel. It's always found in something so ordinary that you could walk past it 1000 times and never see it, never notice it, until you have eyes to see. But when you see that treasure, really see it, how can you not sell all that you have to buy the field?

That's what the wise men were really doing. Now they saw the sign of the treasure, this brilliant light in the heavens, but they didn't worship the light that they saw. They followed the sign. And when they finally got to the treasure, there it was wrapped in a baby. A baby like every other baby that needed to be nursed, changed, washed, held, protected. And as they worshiped this baby, these men sold all they had to buy the field for this treasure. That's what they were doing.

And we need to learn three lessons from these wise men. To....

Behold the treasure in the earthen vessel.

Receive the treasure into the earthen vessel of our own bodies.

Give the treasure to the earthen vessels around us.

Behold the treasure in the earthen vessel

First of all, we have to learn to behold the treasure in the earthen vessel, to see it. To see that the heavenly treasure is always contained in an earthen vessel. And to do this we need to know what we're looking for. Many of us are still looking for the fireworks and the chills and the thrills. Many of us are still hoping that we're going to see some kind of blinding light, like the apostle Paul saw, or at least an Angel like Mary saw. But it wasn't the blinding light that changed Paul's life, and it wasn't the Angel that changed Mary's life.

It was the glory that came from the face of this child

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6

This is the thing that changes us. And keeps changing us when we see it.



When the wise men saw the star, they didn't just get their telescopes out and analyze it. But they followed where the star led, where it pointed. They read the meaning of the sign and pursued it until they finally could see the glory. They kept going until they saw the glory shining out of the face of this ordinary child.

And we need to learn to do the same, don't settle for anything less. Don't be satisfied until you see the glory. And don't be confused by the fact that the glory always is contained in the ordinary. No, they weren't looking for fireworks in heaven. They weren't looking for spiritual thrills, they weren't looking for lots of bang and boom and noise and crash. They were looking for glory. And they had enough sense to know that that glory is always wrapped in something quite earthly. And when they found it, they worshipped.

Now if that glory made itself known to those Gentile wise men, it will make itself known to us, if we seek it.

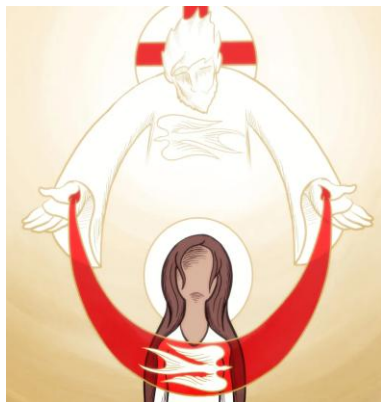
Seek it and you're going to find it. You will see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

You will see it.

Somehow you will see it.

And when you see it, you will not be able to resist, joyfully, selling all you have... to buy the field with the treasure.

Receive the treasure into the earthen vessel of our own bodies



The second thing we need to learn to do is take the treasure into the earthen vessel of our own body...in an act of faith.

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

2 Corinthian 4:6-7

These wise men were not tourists. They didn't travel all that distance and then whip out their cameras and take pictures of each other in front of the manger to show all their friends back home. They were there on business, and their business was to worship. What they did when they found the treasure was bow down. They took off their shoes, they became low, so low that the glory in this infant could flow from the child into them.

Now they gave him gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh which were prophetic gifts. showing what was lying ahead for this child who was to become a king in the highest sense of the word. Who was to become a priest in the highest sense of the word. Who was to become a sacrificial lamb in the highest sense of the word.

But the gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh meant something more than that. These gifts meant that these men were

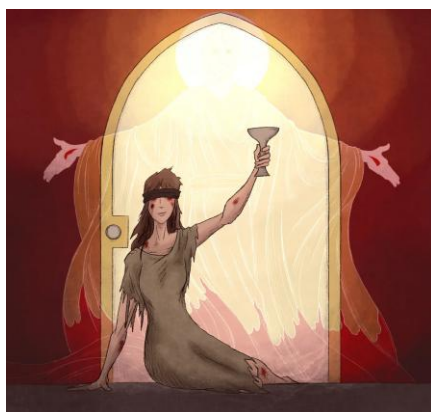
selling out. They were selling all they had to buy the field. They were joyfully making room for this glory to come into the earthen vessel of their bodies.

And that's what we need to learn to do.

We need to learn that no matter where we feel we are on our spiritual journey, to open up wide, and to make room, so that the glory of the Lord can flow into our aging, dying vessels and to let the glory of heaven, which is eternal, to come into us. And we need to make room for this to happen. We need to behold it, to receive it, to make room for it, and push out anything that gets in the way. Don't let anything interfere with this.

***Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.***

Revelation 3:20



“I'm going to make myself known to you. I'm knocking on the door. If you'll open the door, I'll come in. If you will give me any kind of welcome at all I will visit you.

If you will call on my name. I will answer you”.

So we're talking not about accepting a doctrine, holding a certain doctrinal position. We're talking about receiving the Living Spirit of the living Yeshua, into the vessel of our body, into our lives.

Letting him come in.

Letting him take charge.

And even if we don't fully understand what that all means and say “Lord, please take over. Take over the whole house, every room, not just the front parlor but the whole thing, every room in this house and cause

Everything that's evil.

Everything that's deceitful.

Everything that's dishonest.

Everything that's shallow.

Everything that's false.

Everything that's of death

.... to be driven out by your glory”.



And it will be done. It'll be done afresh today.

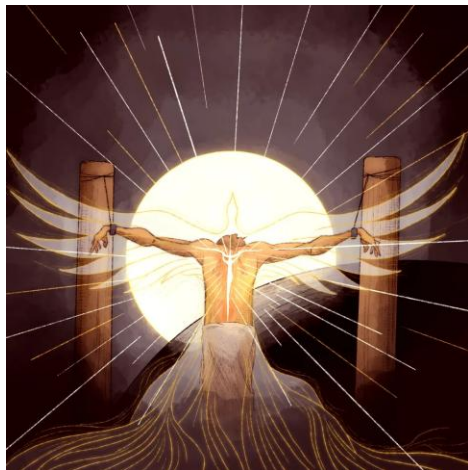
Give the treasure to the earthen vessels around us

And then finally we have to learn to give this glory, which comes into us, to the earthen vessels around us, to those ready to take it.

To give this precious treasure to the earthen vessels who are hungering for and thirsting for and seeking it. And we may not think that there are any such people around, but they are. They're all over the place.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body, this body, this earthen vessel the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that this heavenly treasure, the life of Jesus, the glory of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

2 Corinthian 4:7-10



We really don't know what happened to the wise men when they went back to their homeland. But we can be sure of this, that the heavenly treasure that visited them took control of their lives.

The heavenly treasure always rules the earthen vessel because the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

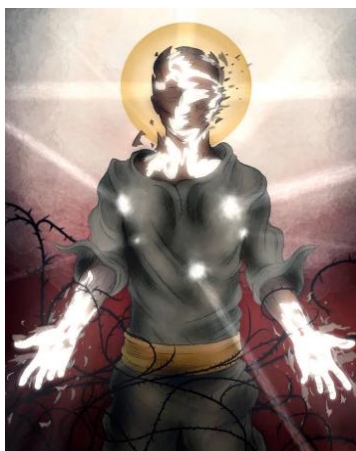
So that if I open myself to the Spirit of the Messiah and he comes in, then my life is no longer mine, but his.

I become his servant. My life becomes his servant.

And now the earthen vessel, this body, this life has its purpose in taking the heavenly treasure around, giving it, yielding it to those nearby who are hungering and thirsting, who are seeking glory, looking for glory.

And there are many such people out there. And all we need to do is share this and give it. But to do this it costs us something. Every time it costs us something.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken struck down, but not destroyed.



Every time we are afflicted. Every time we are perplexed for his sake, persecuted for his sake, struck down for his sake, the death of Christ is working in us in a way that brings life to somebody around us. Somebody nearby who's looking for his glory.

Two brothers and I went into a bar one Saturday passing out these little tracts. We went to the back and as this guy was coming away from the pool table, I offered him a tract and he grunted and looked at me like he wanted to hit me. “What is that?” he said. I said “it’s good news about Jesus”. He started to move in my direction and as he lifted his fist to prepare to hit me when suddenly the bar owner came up from behind, and said “My friend let me have one of those”, diffusing the situation.

There is no guarantee that it wouldn't have happened, that we wouldn't have gotten struck down, but at least that time we got a reprieve. Hostility like that is not pleasant. Who likes that? We don't say "thank you Lord, I got persecuted". We may say it later, but not at the time, not right away.

But whenever hostility like that happens, when persecution happens, there's always somebody who receives a blessing out of it. And I truly believe that this man who stepped in there and kept a fight from breaking out by diffusing the situation, was blessed. This man was blessed. He was touched by the glory of God.

We don't have to make them repeat the four spiritual laws, or the seven steps to salvation, or the sinner's prayer, or this or that or lead them into some program, into some track that we have for them to travel. All we have to do is be there, be there and then give them whatever we have to give them.

Sometimes it's a word.

Sometimes it's a prayer.

Sometimes it's a touch of healing.

And as we do this, the life of God, the glory of God flows out of the earthen vessel of our own bodies, into the thirsting, earthen vessels out there.



May God give us the grace to follow the example of these wise men, to have the eyes to see the glory that's always wrapped in the earthen vessel.

May God help us to keep seeking and not quit seeking until we see the glory wrapped in the earthen vessel and help us to keep seeing that glory all the time. To help us not to look for the fireworks and the thrills and the chills, but to look for the glory in the earthen vessel, to find it hidden in a field.

May God also help us, having seen it, to open ourselves up to receive it.

May God help us, having received it, to begin to share it, to give it to the ones around us who are hungering and thirsting for something real.

For this is the only treasure that will last.

This is the only treasure that will be here when heaven and earth have passed away.

May God give us eyes to see it. And may he give us the hearts to settle for nothing less.

Prayer-Yes Lord, give us the eyes to see this precious treasure. The eyes and the insight to see it in earthen vessels...wrapped in the ordinary, in humility. And oh, Lord give us the thirst, the passion to continue seeking it, to continue pursuing it, until it fills us, until we can continually keep our eyes and hearts fixed on your glory. And until that glory, that treasure within these weak, earthen vessels becomes a healing balm, a drawing force to the other earthen vessels all around us. And yes Lord, bring us to the point in which we settle for nothing less. Amen.

Message: 1987, Christmas Eve

Featured Art: All created by Chris Powers at Full of Eyes.

WHEN VISION COMES



Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples; But the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

Vision happens when God opens somebody's eyes and enables them to see something that the natural eye is not capable of seeing....

His Glory.

Jacob

Jacob falls asleep with his head upon that stone and in his dream, he sees this stairway resting upon the earth and extending all the way up to heaven, to another world, and the Angels of God are ascending and descending upon this stairway. And at the top of the stairway stands the God of Israel himself in glory.



And when Jacob wakes up in the morning, he knows that this was not just another dream.

But that night he had been in the presence of the living God, and that God had revealed something to him, spoken to him, and he made a covenant with God that affected the rest of his life.

Cornelius

Cornelius, a gentile, a professional soldier is praying at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of prayer. And while he's praying, suddenly an angel appears to him and says to him,

“Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.”

(Acts 10:4b-5)



And that vision which came to Cornelius that afternoon transformed his life. It was the turning point. It was the means by which Cornelius also found his way to Jacob's stairway..... For this link between earth and heaven, on which the angels of God ascend and descend to Jesus.

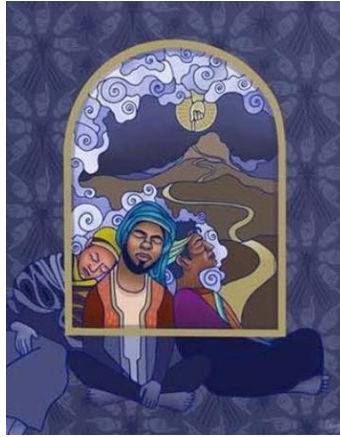
Magi

The wise men, magi. They were of a priestly class in ancient Persia... Iran. And it was customary for them to delve into the occult, into astrology, into all kinds of spirit territory that is out of bounds for any Jew or any Christian. But this was all they knew and as these men looked up and saw the sky and beheld that star they saw something nobody else did.

And they were given vision.

And this vision that came to these magi indicated that the stairway of Jacob had now come to rest upon the earth, in the person of a newborn child, Israel's king....

...And they pursued the vision.



Notice that in every case vision came to ordinary people. There was nothing exceptional about any of those men.

Jacob had his vision at a time when he was extremely selfish and crafty. He had just cheated his brother out of the blessing of the father and long before that he had cheated him out of his birthright and he was running to keep from getting killed by Essau. But he got a vision.

Cornelius made his living by walking around with a sword strapped to his belt.

The wise men didn't know any better than to delve in and play around with dark spiritual fire, but they likewise received vision that brought them to Jacob's Stairway.

Now, if they were not in any way exceptional, just ordinary people like ourselves, how is it that they received vision when so many others were bypassed? What was it that God saw when he looked into their hearts that encouraged him to visit these people with life?

Thinking especially now about the wise men, what was it that these men had about them that drew the light to them and enabled them to follow the light onto the fulfillment of the vision?

We need to know, because we need to have more vision than we have now ourselves.

We need to see Jacob's Stairway also.

We can't go by what people tell us.

We can't go by what we read in books.

We have to see for ourselves who this Jesus is.

And find out for sure whether Jesus is in fact Jacob's Stairway. And we will receive vision.

We can be sure that God will give to us the same light that God gave to them if we will learn three lessons from these wise men.

1. Vision comes to those who are prepared to let their lives become disrupted by the glory of God.
2. Vision comes to those who are willing to seek.
3. Vision comes to those who really worship.

Vision comes to those who are prepared to be disrupted by the Glory of God.



Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, where is he who is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.

These men are in Jerusalem trying to find out what the story is about this, they'd already traveled hundreds of miles. Tremendous disruption.

**Their lives have been really disrupted.
And they were willing to be disrupted.**

Well, there were other wise men in Persia who knew just as much about the stars as these men did. But the difference is that these men, in their hearts, were prepared when they saw light...

....to follow that light
....to move in that light....

....even if it messes up their routine.

And it did mess up their routine. They left their homes, their work, their homeland and traveled for days and days and days, looking for this child. What a wonderful, awesome thing that they held loosely enough....

.....to their routine
.....to their lifestyle
.....to their possessions

....so that they could turn and go on a new path as soon as the light comes to rest upon that path.



Now all through Scripture and all through the history of the Kingdom of God, we see this principle operating....

Vision comes to those who are willing to be disrupted by light from God.

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

That means disruption. It means get out. You can't sit around in those shadows anymore when the light has come to you, you have to get up and speak forth that light and live forth the light that has come.

The light came to Cornelius *and he moved with it.*

The light came to Jacob and he *began to bend his stiff neck.*

The light came to these wise men *and they followed this light.*

What will it be for us this Christmas? Is it going to be another routine Christmas? The same Christmas tree? We pull it out of the attic or buy a new one, same lights, same location, same relatives, same menu, everything the same. Now, there's nothing wrong with that. That can be very beautiful. But are we willing in the midst of all these things which are the same year after year, to allow for change?

Are we prepared to open our hearts and bend them toward the light that comes to us, even now? Are we willing to change our ways, to change our thinking? Whatever it is, are we willing to yield to the life that's trying to bring us closer to Jacob's Stairway, so we can really see and be changed by this?

Supposing, the Spirit of the Lord would have us, for instance, set another place at the table on Christmas, inviting so and so, or supposing the Spirit would like us to have dinner 2 hours later so...so and so could come, or maybe we could get some fellowship?

Vision comes to those who seek.

The Magi not only got the vision that told them about this child but now they had to pursue the fulfillment of the vision and pressed their search until it literally became prayer.

Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. (Matthew 2:2-10)

They knew that they were on to something, they had received some light from this star, but it wasn't clear enough. Like us, "I see, but I need a clearer vision. I see men, but they look like trees walking."

And so they kept pressing their search. They asked questions. They get to Jerusalem, the capital city, the logical place. "Where is this king?" Nobody knows. They go to Herod's palace, that would be a logical place. "Was there a baby born here?" Nobody knows. They call out the theologians, the Bible scholars. They head towards Bethlehem. And now the star begins to guide them again and finally they find this child.



It's always this way in the Kingdom of God, vision is always progressive. If I use the light I have, I get more light. If I pursue the goal that God has set before me, then the goal becomes clearer. But I have to press. God doesn't just give this to us on a silver platter. He holds out something. Now we go for it. And as we do, it becomes brighter.

And this is especially true of our search to behold Jesus, to see him. To ask that God open our eyes and truly enable us to see who he is. This means that we have to back up our asking with a constant pursuit. Not just 20 minutes a day on our knees praying, or walking back and forth praying in the spirit every day, asking for more light. That's great, but it has to be more than that.

It's got to be a continuous pursuit, all the time in our daily lives bringing our minds back around every time they wander. Lord, the one thing I want is to know Jesus. I want to hear him speak. I want to know him in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his suffering, and become like him in his death. I want to know him so well that I'm willing and able to die for him!

Vision comes to those who really worship

When these men found the child, the first thing they did was prostrate themselves, they flattened their bodies out in front of this little baby, in that manger. And then they opened their bags and pulled out their treasure, the best, the most expensive treasures they had.

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

They worshipped him with their hearts. They offered themselves as a living sacrifice, their very bodies. Falling down did for this child and then they also worshiped him with their substance. This is the common denominator of every human being that ever walked this earth that ever has vision.

They worship God with their heart and with their substance.

Cornelius feared God, gave alms liberally, and prayed to God all the time. Jacob, when he had that vision, poured oil over the stone where he had been lying, worshipped and committed himself to ten percent of all he had from there on through. The Wise Men fell down in front of the child with their bodies and then pulled out their treasure.

Now, are we willing to do these two things?

Are we willing to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, to prostrate ourselves in worship?

Are we willing also to worship him with our substance?

The Lord will show us where he wants us to put our gold and frankincense and myrrh. All we have to do is to pour out the gold, the frankincense, and myrrh before God, He'll show us where to put it. He'll show us.

***Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.***

Vision. Jacob stairway.

Jacob's stairway is still here.

The Angels of God ascend and descend upon it.

The father stands above it, in another world.

But in order to behold this stairway, in order to see Jesus for who he is, and to be able to hear Him speak we must have vision. Fresh vision, not last year's vision, today's vision.

The Lord and giver of vision is in your midst. God the Holy Spirit is closer to you now than your breath. And he will indeed open up your eyes, enable you to see, and to be changed by what you see.

Three questions.

Are you right now, prepared to allow our life to be disrupted in whatever way God should choose?

Are you willing to really seek Him and to keep seeking until your whole life becomes prayer?

Are you willing to worship, with your body presented as a living sacrifice and your treasure offered in thanksgiving to him?



Prayer: Lord, bring us to the place where we see Jacob's Stairway, where we experience your presence in a very real way, where your light, your glory shines strongly upon us. When vision comes may we willingly allow the vision to disrupt our lives. May we keep pursuing it, pressing towards it for most of the moments of our lives. And Lord may we offer ourselves, our time, our things, all we have in worship and thanksgiving to you. Help us to arise and shine as you so deserve when vision comes. Amen.

Message: Christmas 1983 aka Jacob's Stairway

Featured Art: All art via gracious permission of Sanctified Art by various artists.

HE COMES TO LIFT US UP

(A Christmas meditation for every day of the year.)



- We praise God for an event which brought hope back to this world.

- We hold fellowship with the One whose birth we celebrate.

Reading Christmas scriptures and singing Christmas songs would mean very little if Jesus himself could not draw near to us even now, and speak to us and fill us with his life.

What a wonderful thing to know that he stands among us, and that he is here to do for us, the same thing he did for Mary and the shepherds and the wise men, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the woman at the well.

Jesus is here to lift us up...in every way to lift us up.

- To lift us up out of our fears.
- To raise us out of our discouragement.
- To bring us up out of whatever bondage we're in.

And make us blazing servants of the Most High God.

And He lifts us up the same way he lifted Mary.

Mary was lifted up,
by having her eyes opened to see the unseen.



In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind 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."

Luke 1:26-31

Now Mary had been going about her life unaware of the awesome things happening around her in the unseen realm, when suddenly this divine messenger who was normally invisible to human eyes stands before her and speaks.

From that moment Mary's life is never the same.

Now Mary is a woman of vision. She sees beyond the visible to the things of God, and by that vision she enters the kingdom of God.

The same Lord who was behind Mary's vision comes to us to lift us up, by opening our eyes to see the unseen.

We've been chained for so long to the world we apprehend with our *senses*.

But the real world, the world behind the visible, the world we have to apprehend with our *spirits* has been largely closed to us.

Jesus desires to touch our eyes so that we can begin to see the kingdom of God more clearly.

Mary was lifted up,
by having divine life put within her.



And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to 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."

Luke 10:34-35

Mary's body became an earthen vessel filled with divine treasure ...

What an awesome thing!...

- she was still Mary,
- she was still an ordinary woman,

but within her was a life that held the divine and human together in an awesome mystery ... a life that was destined to wash away sin and restore the earth.

Mary did not know in every detail what this life within her was destined to do. But she knew that the life was there ... burning inside her and that was all she needed to know to be filled with joy.

And this same Jesus comes to put this same life within us. His life to live within us, to dwell in our earthen vessels, to shine forth from these earthen vessels to heal and restore and save others.

The whole object of Jesus' coming and dying on the cross and rising and sending his Spirit was so that his Spirit, his life, his burning word could live within us. What could be more uplifting to the earthen vessels of our lives than to be filled with the heavenly treasure of Jesus' Spirit?

Mary was lifted up by,
being given a purpose to fulfill in God's kingdom.



And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.
Luke 1:38

And from the moment she accepts her call, and for the rest of her life and through all eternity, Mary is the handmaid of the Lord - the servant of the Messiah who is taking form in her womb. And this purpose never left her. This purpose was her life.

So the Lord comes to us to reveal to us afresh, or perhaps for the first time, our purpose in his kingdom.

"You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bring forth fruit. And that your fruit should remain."

He comes to lift us up,

- by opening our eyes to see the unseen,
- by putting his life within us,
- by giving us a purpose to fulfill in his kingdom.

But there is one barrier which must be removed before Jesus can lift us up:

The barrier of our own vanity.

Jesus cannot lift us up if we're busy trying to lift ourselves.

He only lifts us if we settle down to reality and let him do the lifting.

It's a principle built into God's universe ...and what a blessing when we begin to learn it.....

- ***Whoever humbles themselves shall be exalted.***
- ***Whoever exalts themselves shall be abased.***

Jesus was the incarnation of this principle.

He humbled himself and the Father exalted him.

...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that 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 2:6-11

And every life that Jesus raises into his Father's kingdom follows this same pattern.

- They humble themselves before him.
- They accept their low estate.
- They become poor in spirit.
- They turn and become like little children in their hearts,

---and Jesus raises them up.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

None of us can begin to see the kingdom much less enter it until we empty ourselves of our vanity, our secret self-idolatry, and become poor in spirit.

But when we do become poor in spirit, our eyes open, and there stands Jesus before us, and he lifts us up out of our mire, like he lifted Peter out of the Sea of Galilee that stormy night.

Notice who is chosen to carry this divine life in her body and give birth to this child who is God in the flesh ... a Jewish country girl ... and she knows why she is chosen....



And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden."

Luke 1:46-48a

....the low estate of his handmaiden.

And regarding her low estate God lifts her up.



"For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Luke 1:48b-49

God doesn't need a queen to give birth to his Messiah. He doesn't need a movie star or an opera singer.

He needs an earthen vessel that knows very clearly she is an earthen vessel and gladly accepts the fact that she is an earthen vessel so that he can exalt her in his way.

Jesus came to people who were nothing ... and knew that they were nothing in themselves and made them servants of the Most High God.

- He raised Peter out of the dust,
- He lifted Mary Magdalene from total desolation,
- He took Zaccheus out of his money tree.

The only people Jesus could not raise up into the glory of God were those who were busy exalting themselves.

All he could do for these people was to call them to repentance.

"Come down friend, before you're brought down."

"Humble yourself friend, before God will have to humble you."

But, for the humble ones, the broken ones, the wounded ones, the weeping ones, Jesus did for them what he did for Mary ... he raised them up and he gave them life.

Jesus is among us to lift up the lowly ones. All we have to do is empty ourselves of our vanity, our self-righteousness, and admit with Mary our low estate ... even if we feel we've done pretty well for ourselves in this world ... to remember in the sight of God, in the face of our own impending death, our estate is very low indeed.

All we have to do is admit it, accept it. Why is it so hard for us to say, "Lord Jesus, I'm needy! I'm needy!"?

If we'll only do that. If we'll only draw near and say,

"Please Lord, regard the low estate of your handmaid.

Please Lord, regard the low estate of your servant."

.....he will lift us up.

- He will open our eyes to see the unseen.
- He will put his life within us.
- He will give us a purpose to fulfill in his kingdom.

Are we willing to humble ourselves before Jesus now, so that he can lift us up?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, lift us up in every way... lift us up out of our fears, our discouragement and our bondage. Lift us up so we can have the vision to see your kingdom clearly. Lift us up by filling us with your divine life, so that it shines from us to heal and restore the wounded around us. Lift us up so that we seek your purpose and our place in bringing forward your Kingdom. And Lord lift us up out of our own mire. Empty us of our vanity and self-idolatry. May we approach you with humility, aware of our need to be lifted up. Come to us who are lowly, who are nothing. Raise us up, give us life and make us servants of you the Most High God. Amen.

Message: REB Unknown date

Featured Art: Chris Powers at Full of eyes

THE WAY IN



During these times, finding the way in.... the door to the Kingdom of God is more urgent than ever. This Christmas many are experiencing an atmosphere of uncertainty lurking beneath the colored lights and the holiday cheer, questioning what next year will bring....

Will the country survive this political strife?
Will the economy bottom out?
Will I still have my job in spring?
Will my family be spared an act of random violence?
Will we make it to another Christmas without chaos breaking out?

But what most of us don't seem to understand is that the trembling and the shaking that's going on across the earth, right now, is directly connected with the one whose birth we celebrate this season.

“During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered. It will crush all these kingdoms into nothingness, and it will stand forever.

Daniel 2:44

The stage has been set for the breaking up and the destroying of all the kingdoms of this earth by the Kingdom of God. Now how long it will be until the boom falls, only God knows. But for us, who are followers of Jesus, *if* we're followers of Jesus, this is no time to be sitting around waiting for the trumpet to blow, as if there's nothing else to do.

Because the Kingdom of our Lord, while it is not of this earth, is nevertheless very much present on the earth right now. And every government. And every human structure, whether it be economic or political or military power has its days numbered the minute it is touched by our Lord's Kingdom.



This does not mean that Jesus is out to destroy people. He's not out to hurt anybody. He doesn't get some kind of delight out of seeing people going down the drain.
His purpose is to...

Always bring healing, forgiveness, and life.

And yet look what happened to Herod when the wise men bring the news of this new king of the Jews. Herod flies into a rage, massacres the babies of Bethlehem, and shortly thereafter is himself destroyed.

Pontius Pilate is minding his own business living as if there were no such thing as the Jesus of Nazareth Until one day the mob brings Jesus right to him and says we want him crucified. Jesus doesn't mean any harm to Pilate, He doesn't want to hurt Pontius Pilate. And yet when Pilate consents to Jesus' crucifixion, his star falls.

The City of Jerusalem. Jesus loved Jerusalem, longed to gather her children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, weeps over that city, heals her sick, teaches in her streets. But when Jerusalem rejects him, her days are numbered. And it is not long before her glory is reduced to rubble and dead bodies.

They destroyed themselves.

Now when the Kingdom of God comes, it comes, bringing with it an open door...

Welcoming people into the very heart of God's love.



It doesn't come to damn anybody.
It doesn't come down to hurt anybody.

But when a man or woman looks through that open door and sees that love and then turns their back.....

....they hurt themselves.

The nations of this world are going to find themselves having to do something about an epidemic of radical Christianity that's going to be springing up and causing the gospel to be preached on street corners and housetops. And behind this epidemic of radical faith will be the sheer, divine love of God causing the good news to be going out to the earth for the last time. Then when the nations have to deal with this, they will deal with the Kingdom of God as nations always do, with repression, with jail sentences, and with executions. These things will mark the beginning of the end for nation after nation. War, famine, disease, natural catastrophes, false prophets, false Christs, and political idols will cover the earth with dread.

And then suddenly, our Lord will be seen in the heavens.

And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him and there won't be a person anywhere... man, woman, or child who will be able to say, but wait a minute, "I never knew this, nobody cleared this up to me". Everybody from the least to the greatest, from one end of the earth to the other will know whose light that is up there. There will be no doubt in anybody's mind, none.

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found.

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel 2:34

The Kingdom of this Jesus is a thing of love, always love. The Kingdom of Jesus isn't here to hurt or destroy anybody.

He was born into this world.... for our good only.



The things that he taught were.... *for our good.*
He died on that cross *for our good.*
He rose from the grave..... *for our good*

**He's with you right now for your good... to bring you....
unspeakable blessing.**

This season as we remember his birth, He is present with you and present wherever brothers and sisters anywhere on this earth gather in his name. And especially now in these times, He flings wide open the door of his Kingdom and urges all to come into it.

And for those of us who've already entered in....

..... to penetrate more deeply into the center of the Father's love.

There are three things that Jesus says to us this season....

- 1. Don't Be Afraid of Me**
- 2. I Know What You're Going Through**
- 3. I Will Empower You to Manifest My Grace**

"Don't be afraid of me".

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were afraid.

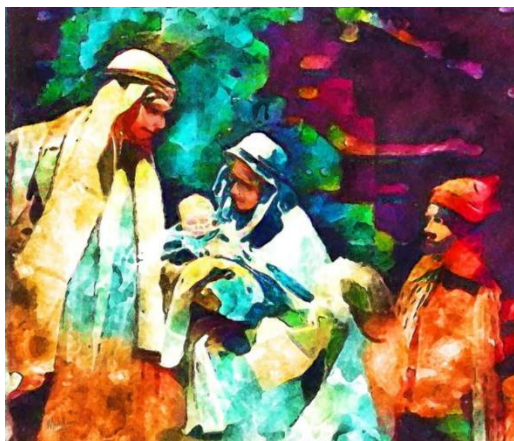
When the multitude saw that man sit up in his coffin at the command of Jesus, rise up in his coffin they were afraid.

When we begin to get any sense of who this is, who is talking to us and speaking to our hearts, we begin to feel fear.

And if you have never known that fear, pray for it because it's the introduction to the reality of God. And all too many of us have no sense of God's reality at all. So if it takes earthquakes and fires to bring it to you, may it be so.

But once you get that sense of who is talking to you and your heart begins to tremble and you really begin to know the fear of God, then Jesus turns around and says "don't be afraid".

He points to the place where he was born, a stable.... born of a peasant girl, dirt poor all his life, no connections with people in high places at any time.



So that, the lowest, the poorest person on this earth, the meanest sinner, the most tormented mind, the most twisted and warped personality.... can draw near to Jesus without being afraid of being rejected.

He's not going to push you away.

He's not going to make some kind of excuse and slam the door in your face.

And he's not going to throw your sins up to you.

If you confess those sins, He's going to take them one by one and He's going to wash them away in his own blood.

“I know what you are going through”.

“I was born into the human race for that purpose. And there's no temptation, and there's no sorrow, and there's no loneliness, and there's no pain that I haven't known”.

There are many of us who are living like there are certain problems we face that Jesus couldn't possibly understand. But he does understand. He understands. He understands not as somebody from a distance observing you, but he understands as your brother and your friend who walked that road before you ever got here, with the pain, the loneliness, and the temptation that you face. He faced them too.

“I know exactly where you are.

I know where you're having trouble, and where you're dejected, and where you're having a difficult time.

I know, and I'm here to help you now and to lift you up. I will do this”.

And I know when you are hurting yourself, where you're cutting corners, and where you're falling into a spiritual slumber, I'm here to wake you up, and call you to repentance, to call you to life. And to help you to live the life that I call you to live.... while there is still time.”

“I will empower you to manifest my grace.

“If you will come into my Kingdom all the way and commit yourself utterly to it, not half baked, all the way. I will enable you to live in this world and in the middle of any personal or worldly turmoil just as I lived in this world of flesh and blood”.



The works that I did you will do also and greater works than these will you do because I am at the right hand of the father and I quicken you, and I intercede for you, and I empower you.

“I'm here to help you. And if you will walk this road with me, I'm going to enable you to do everything that I did. That rock cut out of a mountain without human hands.... began as my crucified and resurrected body twenty one centuries ago.... and it continues on this earth now.... as the body of my Saints. And if you are part of my Kingdom, you are part of that stone”.

*As the father sent me, so I send you.
As the father anointed me, so I anoint you.*

Not just to sit in church.

Not just to say a prayer at night before you go to bed,

“But I anoint you to go out there to...

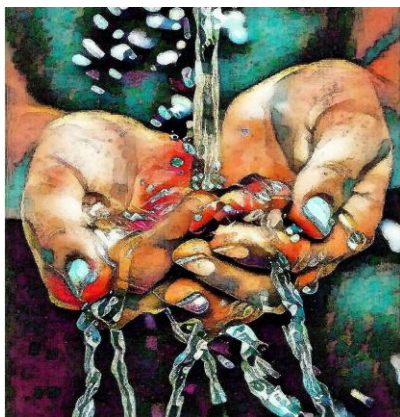
Preach good news to the poor.

Proclaim release to the captives.

Recovery of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty those who are oppressed

I anoint you to do this.



I give you the power to prepare the world for my return.

I give you the power to manifest my grace by.....

Bringing forgiveness to the penitent,

Bringing healing to the sick,

Bringing hope to those who are downtrodden.

And I call you to do this”.

“**You**” says, our Lord to us....

“**You** are the way into my Kingdom, not angels, not spirits.

Flesh and blood sons and daughters of the Kingdom are the way in to the Kingdom”

If the people out there in that world are ever going to see the love of Jesus Christ, it will have to be through us. Don't depend on pastors, evangelists, Christian radio or TV to do that.

You're going to have to do that.

If they're ever going to experience who Jesus is , it's through people that they can reach out and touch, people they can talk to, people they can spend some time with.

**You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.**

You!

Don't waste what he's given you. When he makes us the light of the world, when he makes us the salt of the earth, he holds us accountable.

If the salt loses its flavor it's good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

We are accountable.

Instead of getting caught up in the holiday whirl this season, may the spirit of God really be with us to make the most of the time left in our lives.

May He anoint us to use the days that remain for us to live in this world in flesh and blood to...

Preach good news to the poor.
Release to the captives
Recovery of sight to the blind.
Set at liberty those who were oppressed

May the Spirit of God search your heart, clear your mind, open your eyes, and help you to get yourself right, so that you may immerse yourself in the Father's love, becoming effective ministers of his love so that others may find their way into the Kingdom of God through us in the difficult days that lie ahead of us Before the door of the Kingdom shuts forever.

And for those reading this who haven't yet found their way in....The Spirit of your Lord is calling you to come through that door, now, not tomorrow, now.

And he promises that everything you need, He'll give you.

And he'll give you a confirmation of his word in whatever place you're hurting the most. If you'll only come through that door.

Not after you quit smoking weed,
Not after you stop drinking,
Not after you get your life together.... now.

Whoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out.

He's inviting you now to draw near, just the way you are.



Lord, help us to both find the way in and to be the way in. Despite the shaking that's going on around us, help us to see, hear, and sense you calling us into your Kingdom, into the very heart of your love. May we not turn our backs on the blessing of your call to us. Thank you for welcoming us in just the way we are, for knowing us and understanding us, and for never having to fear your rejection. And for those of us who have found our way in...may we penetrate even deeper into your love. May we manifest your grace so that the broken, the imprisoned, the sick, the oppressed, and the blind find their way to you, through us. May we embrace the anointing and power you pour into us and spend the rest of our days as effective ministers of your love so that in the end countless numbers find their way in. Amen.

Message: REB Christmas 1973 [audio version](#)
Featured art: Mark Rouse

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

A Christmas Prayer



Here's a prayer that Jesus prayed the night he was betrayed, a prayer that is still being answered, even as you read these words:

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

John 17:24

"That they may behold my glory."

If you look back over your life, you will probably find that there was a moment, somewhere back there, when God spoke to you in some way....when you were sure that God was showing you something new, opening your eyes to see something you never saw before---about yourself, or about someone you love.

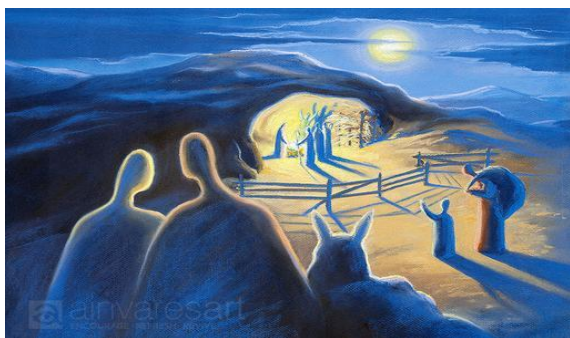
You probably found, as I did, that that moment, when God broke through the darkness of our hard hearts with his light, was a turning point in our lives.

That's what happened with those shepherds. They weren't expecting anything. They were just taking care of business, watching over their sheep when suddenly....

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men."

Luke 2:9-14

It was a moment that changed their lives, gave them eyes to see glory, even in a dark, smelly stable, where there was no blinding light.



Of course, such moments of vision occur only when God chooses. We cannot make them happen. But there's nothing wrong with our asking God to send us a fresh taste of his glory this Christmas, beginning this moment.

If you read through scripture, you discover that the people who were visited by the glory of God were always ordinary, lowly, humble people, like those shepherds. Even when King David or King Solomon saw God's glory, it only happened when they became broken and humble and child-like.

So let's humble ourselves before God right now. Let's turn this moment into a prayer, rising from our hearts, that this Christmas, for all the uncertainty that surrounds us, and all the troubles which may afflict our own souls....that this Christmas, God will visit us, as he visited those shepherds, with a sign of hope. A vision of glory. Light from heaven!

"Ask, and it will be given you," is the promise.

So we ask that somehow this Christmas will be different. That this Christmas our lives will be flooded with something clean, something holy, something eternal, that will give us a clearer vision of the path, and fresh power to stay on the path in the days ahead.

May God make this Christmas for us what it was for those shepherds: a time when heaven breaks into our darkness with light, and draws us nearer than ever to the gift of his Incarnate Word.

"Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory."

May the Father answer that prayer in our lives this Christmas season, beginning now. May he give us eyes to see and hearts to receive his glory---

---and grace to reflect that glory in the way we treat each other, and all people.

Prayer- Dear Holy and kind Lord, visit us this Christmas. We want to be with you where you are. We want to behold the glory that you prayed for. Give us the vision of your glory once again. Break into the darkness that surrounds us. Flood us with your holiness, with clarity, with hope and with your heavenly light. Draw us nearer to you, dear Lord, so our hearts are ready to receive and reflect your glory.

Message: 2009

Art: Kind permission of Ain Vares