

The Story of Christmas

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The Christmas story. What is it? And how did it all begin? Well, there are some who think it is connected somehow with snow and fir trees, holly berries and that sort of thing. Actually, it is unlikely that the Lord Jesus was born on December 25th. We do not know in what season He was born, but probably it was in the fall of the year. Certainly it was not in wintertime when there was snow on the ground. If it had been, the shepherds would not have been out with their sheep. Therefore Christmas really has nothing to do with snow or holly berries or Christmas trees. Now let me qualify that by saying that all these things are lovely, and they have their place — provided they are held in their proper perspective, and if we understand what the Christmas story really is. The Christmas story is that a Savior is born!

The birth of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem has more historical significance than any other single event in history. His coming made an impact upon the world that is unparalleled. No other event in history has had such far-reaching results. The rising of the sun on the eastern horizon in the dark dawn is not any more transforming to the earth than was the coming of the One to the earth back of the inn in Bethlehem, He who bears the title of “The Bright and Morning Star” and “The Sun of Righteousness.”

Now let us look at the record that we have of this event. To start, we have to go back to the beginning of the human family if we are to understand what it means when Jesus our Lord came into this world “a little baby thing,” as George McDonald put it, “that made a woman cry.” So let’s look at the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
(Genesis 2:7, 8)

Apparently mankind and the animal world were very close together and living in harmony with each other. They had coexistence, if you please.

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help fit for him. (Genesis 2:19, 20)

I heard this little story about a couple visiting in Russia. One day they went to a zoo and came to a cage in which was a lion and several lambs! The title on the cage read, “Coexistence.” This couple marveled at a lion and lambs being in that cage together. So they went to the zookeeper and said, “This certainly is most unusual. How can you make a lion and lambs live together? We’ve never seen anything quite like this.”

He replied, “It may be a little unusual.”

“Well, isn’t it difficult to have a lion and the lambs in there together?” the couple persisted.

“Actually, it’s no problem at all,” the zookeeper responded. “All we have to do every now and then is add a lamb!”

We’re told that God gave man dominion in the Garden of Eden — not dominion over only the animal world, but actually over nature itself. I believe that Adam controlled the weather. He

could increase the moisture on the south forty when he wanted to, and he could stop it when he wanted to. But when man sinned, he lost that control. He lost dominion over this earth. And today man has no control of it at all. The floods, the tornados, the earthquakes, as well as all weather conditions in all parts of the world are a revelation of that. Even a little bit of fog on an airport runway can cause tremendous jets to be grounded.

Adam's Disobedience

Now in the Garden of Eden God placed Adam and Eve, and then there came the test:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:16, 17)

It was not a test that concerned whether the forbidden tree was good for food or not. It was probably the best tree in the garden as far as the fruit is concerned. The question was, "Will they obey God?" And the test was strictly on that plane and on that plane alone.

We know the rest of the story: the serpent tempted them and rather than believing God, the man and the woman believed the serpent. I do not know how the serpent looked, but I'm confident that below man he was the highest creature God had created. He was also able to communicate with man, and as a result he was the instrument Satan used.

The man and the woman ate of the tree, and after they had eaten, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden (see Genesis 3:1-8). They had alienated themselves from God.

That is the condition of every person born into this world today. No man has a natural bent for God or a capacity for God. You and I have a nature that hates God, and we're told that our old carnal nature is never a friend of God. It *cannot* be a friend of God. That's what happened when Adam and Eve ate of the tree. And it was evidenced in the fact that they were trying to get away from God. But God was seeking them, as He is always seeking us.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. (Genesis 3:9, 10)

Then God asked Adam several questions, and Adam had to admit that he had failed, that he had eaten of the forbidden tree. He blamed it on the woman — and I guess husbands have been doing that ever since! May I say to you that the thing which entered into this world called *sin* not only alienated man from God, it also alienated members of the animal world, and it alienated man from man.

In pronouncing His judgment, God placed a curse upon the serpent. But notice its effect upon the human race: "Because thou hast done this...I will put enmity between thee and the woman" (Genesis 3:14, 15). And thank God for that enmity! Because of it, man can never be at home in sin. That's the reason the sinner is always restless. That is the reason sin never satisfies. There has never been a drunkard who has gotten as drunk as he wanted to be. There's never been a

man obsessed with making money who has ever made as much as he wanted. No man has ever been able to sin as much as he wanted to. When a man starts out with a bucket of paint to paint the town red, he always runs out of paint. Never has he been able to paint it as red as he would like to. Always he will do it bigger and better the next time — and then he finds out it will ultimately destroy him.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed [not the man's seed, but the woman's seed]; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

This is the first prophecy of the coming of Messiah, the Savior, into the world. Then we read:

Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:23, 24)

God sent the man and his wife outside the garden, and He put there the cherubim — not to keep them away from the tree of life, but to keep the way open for man to come to Him because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (see Hebrews 9:22). The penalty of sin, you see, must be paid. This was graphically taught when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. When they went out of the garden, they were clothed with the skins of an animal — that means the animal had to be slain and its blood shed. This was the great principle put down here and enunciated later and confirmed at the cross of Christ.

Now after the time of Adam and Eve, God began to move in the ancestral line that would eventually lead to the coming of Christ. Beginning down yonder with Adam, then Seth, then Noah, then Shem, then Abraham, then Judah, then David and finally to Mary the mother of Jesus. Those were the steps that led through the Old Testament. And if you want it put into a nutshell, the Old Testament *is* the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It tells of the background that brought Him into the world. The prophets spoke of Him, as did Moses:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

Then Micah the prophet gave the place where Christ was to be born:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)

Also, in Isaiah we read:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Isaiah again tells of the fact that He is to be the ruler who is to come to this earth:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

These Scriptures and these prophecies are all tremendously significant and are indeed important for us to know.

When God Broke Through

Finally the prophet Malachi wrote God's final message of the Old Testament, and there followed no further communication from God. It seemed that heaven had gone off the air and there was no more broadcasting to man. Then after four hundred years of silence God broke through! And He broke through at the altar of prayer when the priest Zacharias was there praying.

Luke's Gospel opens with this message from God. Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth were well along in years but did not have a child, and they wanted a son. So when Zacharias went to the temple to carry out his priestly responsibilities, he probably asked God once again for a son, and while he was there praying God broke His silence and sent the angel Gabriel with His first communication to man in four hundred years. The angel told Zacharias he was to have a son who would introduce the Messiah and prepare the way for Him. Zacharias' son would be the prophet of God in the wilderness, the last of the Old Testament prophets.

That prophet, of course, was John the Baptist, and the sun of the Old Testament set with him, if you please. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who opens the New Testament, friend, not John. John is an Old Testament character, pure and simple, who walks into the New Testament to introduce the Messiah whom the Old Testament said would be coming along.

Strange as it may seem, the one who didn't believe God's message was Zacharias himself! His response was, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (Luke 1:18). There are people, I am confident, who are saying to themselves, "If an angel appeared to me I would believe." No, they wouldn't. We have more evidence than that in the Word of God. If we would just examine it and sift the evidence, we would find God has given us an abundance of well-documented evidence today. And if people don't believe the evidence they already have in the Word of God, they won't believe an angel.

Well, Zacharias did not believe the angel. He said, "How shall I know this?" Unbelief is dumb, so the angel messenger said to this priest that he would not be able to speak until the child was born. And when Zacharias came out from the holy place where he had been serving, he couldn't speak to the people who were waiting for him. So they knew that something tremendous had taken place, that God had broken His silence. It wasn't much longer before Elisabeth was able to confirm God's message and tell her husband that they were to have a child.

Mary is Chosen

Moving along with the story we are told:

And in the sixth month the angel, Gabriel, was sent from God unto a city of Galilee,

named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered in her mind what manner of greeting this should be. (Luke 1:26-29)

Now all of these details are important because the Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled. So it is well that we understand that Joseph was of the house or lineage of David because certain promises had been made to his messianic line.

I also think it is interesting that they lived in Nazareth. Nazareth today is still called one of the holy places because this is where both Mary and Joseph lived and where Jesus was brought up. I suppose that Nazareth looks now very much like it did in the day when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and made the announcement to her. But the prophecy said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, and the line of David belonged in Judea, not way up north in Nazareth. It reveals how mixed together the twelve tribes were when they returned to the Land of Promise after the Babylonian captivity. Nevertheless, soon God would bring Mary and Joseph down to be in Bethlehem in time for the Child to be born there.

Now the announcement to Mary was that she was to be the instrument God would use to bring our Redeemer into the world!

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. (Luke 1:30, 31)

Then the angel gave her important information about her Child:

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:32, 33)

That is the same kingdom spoken of in the Book of Daniel, in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in Ezekiel, and in all of the prophets. Note also that He shall sit on the throne of David. Remember, God had promised David that there would be One coming in his line who would be a world ruler. And, friend, that One is the hope of this world — not the United Nations, not any ruler in any government today, but the One who is yet to sit on David's throne.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered, and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:34, 35)

And so Mary accepted this assignment. She said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).

A little later on Mary went to see Elisabeth. It must have been a wonderful meeting because it was at that time that Mary gave the "Magnificat" — that marvelous song of Christmas in Luke's

Gospel. Mary knew she was a sinner — that is, she had a sin nature as all of us do — and her song speaks of the fact that God is her Savior (see Luke 1:39-56).

Now Joseph was engaged to Mary, and when he learned that she was pregnant he began to wonder. He was about ready to break the engagement when God sent the angel on his third trip, and this time the message was for Joseph. He came to Joseph in a dream and told him to go ahead with the marriage because “she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

John the Baptist is Born

Meanwhile, John the Baptist was born. His father Zacharias still wasn't able to speak, so they asked him, “What shall we name the child?” And he wrote out the name “John,” the name which had already been chosen by God. Then immediately he spoke and praised God (see Luke 1:57-64). When Zacharias took his son into his arms, he gave a wonderful prophecy that is another great song of Christmas. And in his prophecy he said something very interesting:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. (Luke 1:76, 77)

This boy John normally would have been a priest, you see, serving in the temple, as did his father. But God had other plans for this child. He grew to be a mighty preacher as he prepared the people for the coming of Jesus.

Decree of Augustus

Now you will recall that at this time in history the Roman Empire ruled the world, and this of course included the land of Israel.

And it came to pass, in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be registered. (Luke 2:1)

The Temple of Augustus in Turkey has been excavated, and the thing which makes it interesting is that right there was discovered a copy of the tax bill. A few years ago the skeptic and the cynic said that Caesar Augustus never ordered such a taxing as the Scripture records. Well, now all know the exact spot where the decree was made. In fact, I have a picture slide of it. It is written in Latin, and it's a tax bill of Caesar Augustus stating that all the Roman Empire was to be taxed. That decree was read in every hamlet, at every crossroad of the Roman Empire. And it was what brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

Announcement to the Shepherds

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)

Ever since the days of Abraham, the area around Bethlehem has been a place where shepherds keep sheep. They do it even today, so it's still a common thing in that region. But there was one day when something very uncommon happened — an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and told them what had taken place:

And, lo, an angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were very much afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:9-11)

It is interesting that God would send this momentous announcement to, of all people, shepherds — certainly on the lower strata of society, largely uneducated and poorly paid. But God looks on the heart, and they were important to Him.

Then the angel went on to tell the shepherds how they would recognize Him:

And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (Luke 2:12)

Luke is emphasizing His humanity. He came into this world as a human being. He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). God knows about mankind. He knows you, and He knows me. He understands us because He came into this world a human being. This also means that we can know something about God, because He took upon Himself our humanity.

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 toward men. (Luke 2:13, 14)

How wonderful! Many artists have attempted to capture this scene of the shepherds and the appearance of the angel to them.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:15, 16)

It is an amazing thing to see a little baby come into the world, and your heart goes out to him; there is a sympathy that goes from you to him. That is the way God entered the world. He could have entered — as He will when He comes to earth the second time — in power and great glory. Instead, He came in the weakest way possible.

The Greek Orthodox church in Bethlehem is claimed to be built over the place where Jesus was born. That may or may not be true. This place, of course, was a grotto, a cave, and has been made a very beautiful spot in our day — that is, beautiful if you like ornate things. But there was no ornamentation of that sort to welcome Jesus at the time of His birth. We do not know

how it looked, despite the many artistic depictions, but I do not think the stable in which He was born was very attractive.

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. (Luke 2:17, 18)

The Star

Now it was much later, probably six months, and it could have been even eighteen months after the coming of the shepherds, when the wise men arrived at Jerusalem.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:1, 2)

This is the historical record of the coming of the wise men. Notice that they came in the days of Herod the king. One thing that Herod did not want was competition. In fact, the one thing that Herod would not *tolerate* was competition. So the wise men coming to Jerusalem really alerted him.

The question has always been, where did they get their information about the significance of this star? Well, we know this: These men were not superstitious people. The term *wise men* indicated they ranked high in officialdom, equivalent to secretary of state or prime minister. They were students of the stars, and they knew a great deal about them. They also had the prophecy of Balaam, and in that prophecy was the statement that a Star would come out of Jacob and a Scepter would rise out of Israel (see Numbers 24:17). Also the prophecies of Daniel, which were given in that section of the world, revealed almost the exact time when Christ was to be born. So when the wise men saw this unusual star they knew what it meant.

There's no use trying to explain the star on a natural basis. Many astronomers, even Christian astronomers, have said that the star was formed by a conjunction of two planets — Venus and Jupiter — but we don't need that. This was obviously supernatural. No one has explained how the conjunction of Venus and Jupiter could lead the men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem! The nature of the star makes it very clear that this was a supernatural occurrence.

The wise men saw the star in the East. Now let me destroy one of the myths surrounding the Christmas story, which Scripture does not support at all. It is the "eastern star." Was it an eastern star? The Scripture says, "We have seen his star in the east." It was the wise men who were in the East, not the star. If the star had been in the East when the wise men saw it, they would have ended up in Shanghai, China, because that's the direction they would have gone! So it was not an eastern star but actually a western star, and they traveled west — which is how they came to Jerusalem.

Visit of the Wise Men

Now, these wise men — were there three of them? Well, the Scripture doesn't give us the num-

ber, but my feeling is there must have been more than three. Apparently they came from different sections of the East. They probably set a time when they would meet at a certain place, then made their journey together. I do not think three wise men would have caused even a ripple in Jerusalem in that day. My guess is there were nearer three hundred wise men than three. But a great many people have learned the Christmas story from Christmas cards rather than from the Bible, and they don't want to give up the tradition of three wise men.

Now it took them a long time to make this journey. They certainly didn't come by jet. They came on camels. Well, there are two kinds of camels. Some have two humps and others have one hump. I like to call them one-cylinder and two-cylinder camels. So let's guess that all the wise men must have come on one-cylinder camels because, as we will see, it took them quite a while to get there.

As I've said, when the wise men came first to Jerusalem, they caused quite a stir there. They wanted to worship Him, the One who had been born King of the Jews, so they made inquiry. Word was brought in to old Herod that there was a group of men, probably quite a group of them, looking for the newly born King of the Jews.

When Herod, the king, had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)

Well, Herod happened to be the king of the Jews. And if you think he was going to let a little baby survive who bore the title, "King of the Jews," you are wrong. But Herod was a very clever ruler, and very brutal — probably one of the biggest rascals who ever lived.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where the Christ should be born. (Matthew 2:4)

He didn't ask; he *demanded*. He said, "I know that you have the Scriptures and in them you have a record of a Messiah that is coming. I want to know where He is to be born."

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people, Israel. (Matthew 2:5, 6)

They knew where it was — Bethlehem — because it was written by the prophet Micah who had pinpointed the place, so they were able to identify it immediately.

Knowing that Jesus was in Bethlehem, Herod was already plotting His death. But he wanted more information, and the wise men were ushered into his presence.

Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. (Matthew 2:7, 8)

He was being as subtle as an old serpent, and that's exactly what Herod was. Suppose he had

said, “If there’s a king born around here, I’m going to get rid of him,” and then had sent soldiers down to Bethlehem. I can assure you that he would never have found the Child because He would have been hidden. Herod knew that the clever way and the best way was to let the wise men go down and find the Child and then come back and tell him. So he said he also wanted to go down and worship Him, but of course what he really wanted to do was kill Him.

Born to Die

The wise men did go to Bethlehem, and the star led them to the exact place. Now when they arrived in Bethlehem, they found Jesus’ family — but not in a stable. You may see shepherds and wise men together at the manger in church pageants and on Christmas cards, but that’s not the way it took place. The wise men came a long time afterwards. How do we know that? Well, the record makes it clear. When the wise men got there, the Lord Jesus was no longer in a stable but in a house.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him...

Now certainly this would have been the appropriate time for the wise men to worship Mary if God intended that she should be worshiped. She was there in the house with Jesus. But did you notice what the Scripture says? “They fell down, and worshiped *him*,” not “her” and not “them.”

...and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

Evidently the tradition for the number of wise men originated at this juncture because of their gifts. They brought three different kinds of gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold is the gift for kings, as is frankincense, but why myrrh? Well, myrrh was used as a perfume for embalming. Even in His birth, His death is there. He was born to die, if you please. Remember that John the Baptist said,

Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Jesus was that Lamb whom Abraham had mentioned: “God will provide himself a lamb” (Genesis 22:8). God spared Abraham’s son, but God did not spare His own Son. Instead He gave Him up freely. That’s the reason the Son of God came yonder to Bethlehem.

Now the wise men went back to their own country by a different route. They were warned by God to do that because Herod intended to kill the little Child.

And when they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt. (Matthew 2:13, 14)

Joseph obeyed instantly and took the mother and Child down to Egypt. Herod would have killed Him if he had found Him.

I think it is interesting that in those days they went down to Egypt for sanctuary. It would be a dangerous place for them to go today. In fact, is there a safe place where Jesus could be born in our day? In Egypt? In Bethlehem? Certainly not anywhere in the Middle East. And I'm afraid that Santa Claus has displaced Him in this country in which we live, as well.

How long did they stay in Egypt? We don't know exactly. But God told them when it was time for them to leave:

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead who sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee; and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. (Matthew 2:19-23)

So they settled in Nazareth, the place where our Lord was brought up, and entered the so-called silent years during which the New Testament tells us only a single incident when Jesus was twelve years old. Then there was nothing more for about eighteen years until the announcement of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Friend, why did Jesus come? He came to destroy the greatest enemy that you and I have: Death. The way the writer of Ecclesiastes (12:6) describes death is as a wheel, broken at the cistern. The wheel pictures the circulatory system — that is, the heart — broken at the cistern, no longer pumping blood. May I say, death has come to mankind, "for as in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Jesus Christ was born into this world to deal with our greatest enemy — the enemy that no doctor, no scientist, no world ruler can deal with because death deals with all of *them*, and when he knocks they have to put down whatever they are doing.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:27, 28)

He will remove death when He comes again to this earth. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. And death today is the result of sin.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned. (Romans 5:12)

We all sinned in Adam — that is, Adam's sin is made over to you and me. When a precious little baby dies, certainly it is not because the little one committed a sin, but because it has the Adamic nature. We all have it. We are all born with it. Christ came to deal with that sin nature

which no man can deal with.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

Just as you and I have inherited a sin nature, death will come to us. And we're eternally separated from God unless we come to Jesus Christ — He alone can make us righteous.

He gives us His righteousness as He takes our sin in His death upon the cross. In His resurrection He justifies us, and today you can be made acceptable in Christ. Either you have as much right in heaven as Christ has, or you have no right there at all. Your right is His right, for He has made over to you all that He is. That's the only thing that can get you and me to heaven, my friend. Some two thousand years ago He took upon Himself our humanity that we might be made righteous in Him and complete in Him.

That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Romans 5:21)

This is the reason that we can sing,

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.*

— Isaac Watts