

# Seeing Jesus at Christmas



**20 Daily Readings  
from the Gospels**

**J.C. Ryle  
Adapted by Ron Jones**

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## J.C. Ryle Bio

J.C. (John Charles) Ryle was born on May 10, 1816 in Cheshire, England. He grew up in a nominally Christian home. His parents were members of the Church of England, but were never committed to it or to Christ. However, God began to work in J.C.'s heart when he was a young man. He became seriously ill with a chest infection and was confined to rest. During this time, he began to read the Scriptures seriously and to pray and eventually came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Reflecting on his salvation, J.C. commented later, "Nothing to this day appeared to me so clear and distinct as my own sinfulness, Christ's preciousness, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, [and] the need of being born again."

He was ordained as a pastor and preacher in the Church of England in December 1841 at the age of 25 years old. He served as pastor in four congregations during his ministry. He became well-known as a strong and Biblically sound teacher of the Scriptures. He preached many sermons and wrote many tracts (small booklets on various Bible topics) addressing contemporary issues of his day that he felt Christians needed to understand. He wrote several books, the most famous being "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels." The "Expository Thoughts" is a book which gives a passage by passage explanation of the four gospels balancing solid scholarship with practical exhortation. Ryle lived to be 84 years old and died on June 10, 1900 in Chidwall, England.

JC Ryle was a man who loved Christ and loved his Word. He was a careful scholar who had a desire that Christians understand the practical applications of the Gospels based up a clear understanding of what the writers meant when they wrote them.

## Preface

The season of Christmas is a time of extreme busyness. For us as Christians it can cause great conflict in our minds and hearts as we attempt to keep Christ in Christmas while at the same time getting done all the various responsibilities we have. One of the best ways this can be done is to spend a brief amount of time each day during the Christmas season reading and reflecting on what the Scriptures reveal about our wonderful Savior at the time of his birth. Through these Bible passages we can come to know Jesus in a deeper way. This ebook of twenty daily readings has been adapted from JC Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. I have designed this daily reading schedule to help you as a believer to focus on Jesus during this hectic time of year.

I have adapted his writing by updating his wording for contemporary readers and by adding a Christmas application to each passage. I have also added my own exposition about Christ from the text in places where Ryle may not have given as full an explanation of Christ as it was my purpose to do in this ebook for Christmas.

My hope is that JC Ryle would have been blessed by how I have taken his work and adapted it for Christians living today for the Christmas season. I do know that he, like I, am always encouraged when the Word of God is carefully explained and the Lord of our lives is glorified through that exposition. May the Lord encourage you through his Word in this ebook this wonderful Christmas season!

Ron Jones

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# 1

## The Eternal Divine Son of God

Day 1 John 1:1-5

Day 2 John 1:6-13

Day 3 John 1:14

Day 1  
John 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created by him, and apart from him nothing was created that has been created. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it.*

The five verses now before us contain a statement of incomparable magnificence concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is, beyond all question, the one John calls "the Word." No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man's understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind. This passage is where any celebration of Christmas should begin, with the Son of God before he was born into the world. Christmas is a time to remember who that child born in Bethlehem really was. He was not just an ordinary child, but the Son of God. John calls him "the Word of God," to share with us that like the Word, in the Old Testament, he was the one who revealed the Father to the world. Christ did not come just to die, but also to reveal the true nature of the Triune God.

First, we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is eternal. John tells us that "in the beginning was the Word." He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did he begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father "before the world was." (John 17:5) He was existing when matter was first created, and before time began. He was "before all things." (Colossians 1:17). He was from all eternity.

Second, we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with him. John tells us that "the Word was with God." The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an inexpressible union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. This is a great mystery! Blessed is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

Third, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God. John tells us that "the Word was God." He is not merely a created angel, or a being inferior to God the Father, and invested by him with power to redeem sinners. He is nothing less than perfect God, equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds.

Fourth, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things. John tells us that "All things were created by him, and apart from him nothing was created that has been created." So far from being a creature of God, as some have falsely asserted, he is the being who made the worlds and all that they contain. "He commanded and they were created." (Psalm 148:5)

Last, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual life and light. John tells us, that "in him was life, and the life was the light of men." He alone is the eternal fountain from which the sons of men have ever received life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall was from Christ. Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience or understanding any one has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know him, have forgotten the fall, and their own need of a Savior. The light has been



constantly shining "in darkness." Most have "not comprehended the light." But if any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Let us read these first five verses of John's Gospel often. Let us note what kind of being the Redeemer of mankind needed to be in order to provide eternal redemption for sinners. If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most people suppose. The right measure of sin's sinfulness is the dignity of him who came into the world to save sinners. If Christ is so great, then sin must indeed be sinful!

Let us read these first five verses of John's Gospel often during our Christmas season. It is not one of the traditional readings, but it is one with the most meaning. Let us note that the Savior in whom the believer is urged to trust is nothing less than the Eternal God, one able to save all that come to the Father by him. He that was "with God," and "was God," is also "Emmanuel, God with us." Let us thank God that our help is laid on one that is mighty (Psalm 89:19). In ourselves we are great sinners, but in Jesus Christ we have a great Savior. He is a strong foundation-stone, able to bear the weight of a world's sin. He that believes on him shall not be disappointed (1 Peter 2:6).

Day 2  
John 1:6-13

*There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came for a testimony to bear witness of the light so that all men might believe through him. He was not the light, but was sent to bear witness of the light. There was the true light that comes into the world which lights every man. He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world did not know him. He came to his own people and his own people did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the authority to become the children of God, even to those who believe in his name who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Often at Christmas we forget about John the Baptist who had a central role in the coming of the messiah. He was appointed by God as the prophet who was to identify the child born in the manger as the Son of God when Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty. It was prophesied in Isaiah 40 that God would send a messenger before the messiah to prepare the way for him. When John came and preached the coming of the messiah, it was prophetic proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

We see, also, in these verses, one principal position which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies towards mankind. We have it in the words, "He was the true light that comes into the world which lights every man." We celebrate Christmas using many kinds of lights around our trees, around our houses and around many other areas. The clear white lights shine the brightest and most beautifully. They symbolize the light of Jesus Christ which he brought to the world when he was born.

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, and beauty. Like the sun, he shines for the common benefit of all mankind, for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, he is free to all. All may look at him and drink spiritual health out of his light. But whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun and the light of the world. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus.

We see in these verses, the desperate wickedness of man's natural heart. We have it in the words, Christ "was in the world and the world was made by him and the world did not know him. He came to his own people and his own people did not receive him."

Christ was in the world, invisible and unseen, long before he was born of Mary at that first Christmas. He was there from the very beginning, ruling, ordering, and governing the whole creation. By him all things are held together. (Colossians 1:17) He gave to all life and breath, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. By him kings reigned and nations were increased or diminished, yet men did not know him and did not honor him. They "worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator." (Romans 1:25) The natural heart is indeed "wicked!"

Christ came visibly into the world when he was born at Bethlehem and he was not treated any better by his own people. He came to the very ones whom he had brought out from Egypt and purchased for his own. He came to the Israelites whom he had separated from other nations, and to whom he had revealed himself by the prophets. He came to those very people who had read of him in the Old Testament Scriptures, seen him under types and figures in their temple services, and professed to be waiting for his coming. And yet, when he came, those very people

did not receive him. They even rejected him, despised him, and slew him. Well may the natural heart be called “desperately wicked!”

We see, lastly, in these verses, the vast privileges of all who receive Christ and believe in him. We are told that “as many as received him to them gave he gave the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.” Christ will never be without some servants. If the vast majority of the Israelites did not receive him as the Messiah, there were, at any rate, some who did. To them he gave the privilege of being God's children. He adopted them as members of his Father's family. He reckoned them his own brothers and sisters. He conferred on them a great dignity. He made them sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Privileges like these, it should be remembered, are the possession of all, in every age, who receive Christ by faith, and follow him as their Savior. They are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26) They are born again by a new and heavenly birth and adopted into the family of the King of kings. Few in number and despised by the world as they are, they are cared for with infinite love by a Father in heaven, who, for his Son's sake, is well pleased with them. In time, he provides them with everything that is for their good. In eternity, he will give them a crown of glory that does not fade away. These are great truths! But faith in Christ gives men a title to them. Good masters care for their servants, and Christ cares for his.

Christmas time is a perfect time to ask ourselves, “Are we children of God? Have we been born again? Have we the marks which always accompany the new birth, a sense of sin, faith in Jesus, love of others, righteous living, and rejection of the values of the world?” Let us never be content until we can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Do we desire to be children of God, but are not sure we are? Then, right now as we approach the celebration of the birth of our Savior, let us “receive Christ.” Let us speak to Jesus, turn from our sin, and ask him to become our Savior. Let us trust in him with our whole hearts to deliver us from the penalty of sin. To everyone that so receives him this Christmas, he will give the privilege of becoming a child of God.

Day 3  
John 1:14

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We saw his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

For many, Christmas is a celebration of good things, good people and goodwill. It is a celebration of family and loving others. It has many symbols, one of which is the manger scene. Jesus' birth is added as a spiritual part of Christmas, nothing more. They have no interest in who Jesus really was and what he did for mankind.

For us, as believers, it is very different. We believe Jesus, that child born in Bethlehem, was the Son of God who became a human being to bring us into his kingdom. We celebrate his birth because of who he is and what he did for us. How do we know that Jesus is the Son of God? John the apostle tells us simply and clearly as he brings in John 1:14. He brings out the true meaning of Christmas as he unfolds for us the true identity of this child born in such humble circumstances.

The passage of Scripture now before us is very short, if we measure it by words. But it is very long, if we measure it by the nature of its contents. The substance of it is so immensely important that we shall do well to give it separate and distinct consideration. The main truth which this verse teaches is the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation. John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The plain meaning of these words is that our divine Savior took human nature upon him, in order to save sinners. He became a man like us in all things except for sin. Like us, he was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like us, he grew from an infant to a teenager and from a teenager to an adult, both in wisdom and in stature. (Luke 2:5) Like us, he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, and was moved to anger and compassion. Having become flesh, and taken a body, he prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted his human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, he suffered and shed his blood, died, was buried, rose again, and ascended up into heaven. And yet all this time he was God as well as man!

This union of two natures in Christ's one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith. It needs to be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths which are not meant to be curiously analyzed, but to be reverently believed. The Son of God who is one substance with the Father took man's nature in the womb of the virgin Mary so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, so that there is one Christ, truly God and truly man.

We must never forget that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in him were never mingled. One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The deity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although it was veiled. He did lay aside his use of his divine attributes for his own benefit and submitted his use of his divine attributes to the Father's will while on earth. The manhood of Christ, during his lifetime was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of his incarnation.

He who has gone into heaven and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He who

suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was “God revealed in the flesh.” Though he became “flesh” in the fullest sense when he was born of Mary, he never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word.

This constant undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's person is exactly what gives infinite value to his mediation, and qualifies him to be the very mediator that sinners need. Our mediator is one who can sympathize with us, because he is truly man. And yet, at the same time, he is one who can deal with the Father for us on equal terms because he is truly God. It is the same union which gives infinite value to his righteousness when imputed to believers. It is the righteousness of one who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which he shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of one who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to his resurrection. When he rose again as the head of the body of believers, he rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts.

The incarnation and what it means to us is what Christmas is all about. It should stir within us feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding comfort for all who know Jesus Christ by faith and believe in him. Did the Word become flesh? Then he is one who can be touched with the feeling of his people's weaknesses because he has suffered himself, being tempted. He is almighty because he is God and yet he can sympathize with us, because he is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then he can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had he walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to “walk even as he walked.” (1 John 2:6) He is a perfect pattern because he is God. But he is also a perfect pattern for us because he is man.

## The Birth of the Forerunner of Jesus Foretold

- Day 4 Luke 1:5-12
- Day 5 Luke 1:13-17
- Day 6 Luke 1:18-25

Day 4  
Luke 1:5-12

*There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. They had no child because Elizabeth was barren and they both were now well advanced in years. Now while he was performing the priest's service before God in the order of his division according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And a whole multitude of people were praying outside at the time of the incense offering. An angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled and filled with fear when he saw him.*

As we reflect on the great events of Christmas, we rarely think of Elizabeth and Zechariah, the godly and faithful parents of John the Baptist. They played an important role as God gave them the task of birthing and raising the prophet of God who was to announce the coming of Jesus as the messiah according to God's prophecy in the Old Testament.

The first event recorded in Luke's Gospel is the sudden appearance of an angel to a Jewish priest named Zechariah. The angel announces to him that a son is about to be born to him by the miraculous power of God and that this son is to be the forerunner of the long-promised Messiah. The word of God had plainly foretold that when Messiah came, a messenger would go before him to prepare his way. (Malachi 3:1) The wisdom of God provided that when this forerunner appeared, he would be born in the family of a priest.

It is difficult to truly understand, at this period of time in the history of the world, of the immense importance of this angel's announcement. To the mind of a pious Jew, it must have been glad tidings of great joy. It was the first communication from God to Israel since the days of Malachi. It broke the long silence of four hundred years. It told the believing Israelite that the prophetic weeks of Daniel were being fulfilled (Daniel 9:25), that God's choicest promise was at length going to be accomplished, and that "the seed" of Abraham was about to appear in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. (Genesis 22:18) We must place ourselves by our imagination in the position of Zechariah, in order to give the verses before us their due weight.

Let us notice, for one thing, in this passage, the high testimony which is borne to the characters of Zechariah and Elizabeth. We are told that they were "both righteous before God," and that "they walked blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord."

Zechariah and Elizabeth had grace when grace was very rare, and kept all the burdensome observances of the ceremonial law with devout conscientiousness, when few Israelites cared for them excepting in name and form.

The main thing that concerns us all is the example which this holy couple holds up to Christians. Let us all strive to serve God faithfully and live fully up to our light, even as they did. Let us not forget the words of Scripture, "He who does righteousness is righteous." (1 John 3:7) Happy are those Christian families in which it can be seen that both husband and wife are genuinely "righteous," and behave in a godly manner toward God and toward men. (Acts 24:16)

Let us notice, for another thing, in this passage, the heavy trial which God was pleased to lay on Zechariah and Elizabeth. We are told that "they had no child." The full force of these words

can hardly be understood by a modern Christian. To an ancient Jew they would convey the idea of a very weighty affliction. To be childless was one of the bitterest of sorrows (1 Samuel 1:10) in ancient times. It meant that there would be no one to help them in their old age. It meant there would be no son or daughter of their bloodline to inherit their land.

The grace of God exempts no one from trouble. Let us remember this, if we serve Christ, and let us not consider trials an unusual thing. Let us rather believe that a hand of perfect wisdom is measuring out our entire portion, and that when God brings trials into our lives, it is to make us "partakers of his holiness." (Hebrews 12:10) If afflictions drive us nearer to Christ, the Bible, and prayer, they are positive blessings. We may not think so now, but we shall think so when we wake up in heaven with the Lord.

Let us notice, for another thing, in this passage, the means by which God announced the coming birth of John the Baptist. We are told that "an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah."

The ministry of angels is undoubtedly a deep subject. Nowhere in the Bible do we find such frequent mention of them as in the period of our Lord's earthly ministry. At no time do we read of so many appearances of angels as about the time of our Lord's incarnation and entrance into the world. The meaning of this circumstance is sufficiently clear. It was meant to teach the church that Messiah was no angel, but he is the Lord of angels, as well as of men. Angels announced his coming. Angels proclaimed his birth. Angels rejoiced at his appearing. And by so doing they made it plain that he, who came to die for sinners, was not one of them, but one far above them, the King of kings and Lord of lords. If Jesus truly were the Son of God being born into the world (which he was), we would expect angelic activity heralding that incredible news (and that is what we see).

One thing about angels, we must never forget. They take a deep interest in the work of Christ and the salvation which Christ has provided. They sang high praise when the Son of God came down to make peace by his own blood between God and man. They rejoice when sinners repent and sons and daughters are born again to our Father in heaven. They delight to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Let us strive to be like them in this way while we are upon earth. This is the way to prepare ourselves for heaven.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, the effect which the appearance of an angel produced on the mind of Zechariah. We are told that he "was troubled, and fear fell upon him." The experience of this righteous man here parallels that of other saints under similar circumstances. Moses at the burning bush and Daniel at the Tigris river, the women at the tomb, and John on the isle of Patmos, all showed similar fear to that of Zechariah. Like him, when they saw visions of things belonging to the spiritual world, they trembled and were afraid.

How are we to account for this fear? To that question there is only one answer. It arises from our inward sense of weakness, guilt, and corruption. The vision of an inhabitant of heaven reminds us forcibly of our own imperfection and of our natural unfitness to stand before God. If angels are so great and terrible, what must the Lord of angels be like?

This Christmas, let us bless God that we have a mighty Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Believing in him, we may draw near to God with boldness and look forward to the day of judgment without fear. When the mighty angels shall go forth to gather together God's elect, the elect will have no cause to be afraid. To them the angels are fellow-servants and friends. (Revelation 22:9) The birth of our Savior over two thousand years ago has secured our future of eternal blessing with him.



Day 5  
Luke 1:13-17

*But the angel said to him, "Do not fear, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son and you will call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will not drink wine or strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. He will turn many people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him [the messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

When we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the faithfulness of God to answer the prayers of his people. Israel had for so long waited for the messiah whom God had promised would bring them into his righteous kingdom. The true godly Israelite at the time of Christ's coming was praying intently for this important event. When an angel appeared to Zechariah, their prayers began to be fulfilled in their lifetime. It was finally happening.

We have, in these verses, the words of the angel who appeared to Zechariah. They are words full of deep spiritual instruction. We learn here, for one thing, that prayers are not necessarily rejected because the answer is delayed for a long time. Zechariah, no doubt, had often prayed for the blessing of having children, and, to all appearance, had prayed in vain. At his advanced time of life, he had probably long ceased to mention the subject before God and had given up all hope of being a father. Yet the very first words of the angel show plainly that the earlier prayers of Zechariah had not been forgotten, "Your prayer has been heard; your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son."

We will do well to remember this fact whenever we kneel down to pray. We must beware of hastily concluding that our prayers are useless, especially in the matter of intercessory prayer on behalf of others. It is not for us to prescribe either the time or the way in which our requests are to be answered. God, who knows best the time for people to be born, knows also the time for them to be born again. Let us rather "continue in prayer," "be watchful to pray," "pray always and do not faint." "Delay of answer," says an old pastor, "must not discourage our faith. It may be, God has long granted the prayer request, before we shall know of his granting it."

We learn, in the second place, that no children cause such true joy as those who have the grace of God. It was a child about to be filled with the Holy Spirit to whose father it was said, "You shall have joy and gladness and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Grace is what we should desire for our children. It is a thousand times better for them than beauty, riches, honors, rank, or high connections. Until they have grace we never know what they may do. They may make us weary of our life and bring down our gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. When they are converted to Christ, and not until then, they are provided for, both for time and eternity. "A wise son makes a glad father." (Proverbs 10:1) Whatever we seek for our sons and daughters, let us first seek that they may have a place in God's salvation covenant and a name in the book of life.

We learn, in the third place, the nature of true greatness. The angel describes it, when he tells Zechariah that his son "shall be great in the sight of the Lord." The measure of greatness which is common among men is utterly false and deceptive. Princes and rulers, conquerors and leaders

of armies, statesmen and philosophers, artists and authors, are the kind of men whom the world calls "great." Such greatness is not recognized among the angels of God. Those who do great things for God, they reckon great. Those who do little for God, they reckon little. They measure and value every man according to the position in which he is likely to stand at the last day.

Let us not be ashamed to make the angels of God our example in this matter. Let us seek for ourselves and our children that true greatness which will be owned and recognized in another world. It is a greatness which is within the reach of all, of the poor as well as the rich, of the servant as well as of the master. It does not depend on power or prestige, on money or on friends. It is the free gift of God to all who seek it at the Lord Jesus Christ's hands. It is the portion of all who hear Christ's voice and follow Him, who fight Christ's battle and do Christ's work in the world. Such may receive little honor in this life, but their reward shall be great at the last day.

Let us remember these things especially in the training of our young children. We should always deal with them as responsible to God. We should never allow ourselves to suppose that they are too young to have faith. Of course, we must be reasonable in our expectations. We must not look for evidences of grace, unsuitable to their age and capacities. But we must never forget that the heart which is not too young to sin is also not too young to be filled with the grace of God.

The Christmas season is a wonderful time to teach our children about the grace of God displayed in the baby in a manger in the God-man who grew up and died on the cross for our sins. There is no greater gift of grace that God could give than Jesus Christ, his only Son become a man to take our penalty of sin upon himself. If you have nieces, or nephews, children or grandchildren, make the Christmas season a time of reading and telling the story of Christmas, how the Son of God was born in a manger, grew up, and gave his life for us so that we might be with him forever.

Day 6  
Luke 1:18-25

*Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this for sure? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God and I have been sent to speak to you and to show you this good news. Behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things are performed because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their time." The people waited for Zechariah and were wondering why he delayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple for he made signs to them and remained speechless. It came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his service were accomplished, he departed to his own house. After those days his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and hid herself for five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked favorably on me to take away my reproach among men."*

Christmas comes every year whether we want it to or not. It isn't always a time when things are going well for us. It can be a time of real difficulty in our lives. In those times, we need to approach the celebration of the birthday of our Lord by faith.

It's easy for us to think that since God called Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and Zechariah for such important roles in his redemptive plan, things would be easy for them, but they weren't. They experienced supernatural revelation which no one else had seen and they had to birth and raise boys in the midst of poverty and the oppression of a foreign government. For Zechariah, it would require a stretching of his faith.

We see, in this passage, the power of doubt in a godly man. Even though Zechariah was righteous and holy, the announcement of the angel appears to him incredible. He cannot think it possible that an old man like himself should have a son. "How shall I know this for sure?" he says, "for I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

A well-instructed Jew, like Zechariah, should not have raised such a question. No doubt he was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. He should have remembered the wonderful births of Isaac, and Samson, and Samuel in ancient times. He should have remembered that what God has done once, he can do again, and that with him nothing is impossible.

Let us learn in wisdom from the fault of Zechariah. It is a fault to which God's people in every age have been sadly liable. The histories of Abraham, and Isaac, and Moses, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, will all show us that a true believer may sometimes be overtaken by doubt. Let us pray daily, "Lord increase my faith." Let us not doubt that when God says something in his Word, that it will be fulfilled.

We see furthermore, in these verses, the privilege and portion of God's angels. They enjoy God's immediate presence. The heavenly messenger, who appears to Zechariah, rebukes his unbelief by telling him who he is, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and have been sent to speak to you." The account which Gabriel gives of his own angelic position should cause us to search our hearts. This mighty spirit, far greater in power and intelligence than we are, counts it his highest honor to "stand in God's presence" and do God's will. Let our aims and desires be in the same direction. Let us strive so to live, that we may one day stand with boldness

before the throne of God. May we endeavor to walk in it during the short time of this present life that we may stand with God's elect people and angels in the endless ages of eternity.

We see, finally, in this passage, the consequences of Zechariah's doubt in the sight of God. The doubts and questionings of Zechariah who was a priest of God brought down upon him a heavy chastisement. "You shall be silent," says the angel, "and not able to speak because you did not believe my words." It was a chastisement peculiarly suitable to the offence. The tongue that was not ready to speak the language of believing praise was struck speechless. It was a chastisement of long continuance. For nine long months, at least, Zechariah was condemned to silence, and was daily reminded, that by his momentary unbelief he had offended God.

However, Zechariah was a believer and God did not discipline him out of anger, but rather out of love and used it as a sign to himself and his people of the importance of faith. Every day that Zechariah was silent, it was a reminder to him and the people around him that an angel had appeared to him and that his son was to be a special messenger for God. God turned Zechariah's doubt into an instrument to build faith in Zechariah, his family and the people of God around him! God would still use him in a mighty way for his plan of redemption.

We also as Christians struggle with doubt. Although we will not receive the strong discipline that Zechariah received, it does have consequences in our lives. Doubting God is a practical denial of God's Almighty power, to doubt whether he can do something when he undertakes to do it. Let us watch and pray daily against this. Doubt robs believers of their inward peace, weakens their hands in the day of trials, brings clouds over their hopes, and makes their lives a burden. According to the degree of our daily faith will be our daily enjoyment of Christ's salvation, our patience in the day of trial, our daily victory over the world. As believers, we should continually follow what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Christmas time is a time to strengthen our faith as we celebrate how God has used such weak human beings to bring such a wonderful blessing to the world, his Son, Jesus Christ. This season may be filled with hardships and difficulties, but God has promised that if we hold onto Christ by faith, he will work in our lives and bring his blessing in the midst of it. (Romans 8:28)

## The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Day 7 Luke 1:26-33

Day 8 Luke 1:34-38

Day 7  
Luke 1:26-33

*And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her, and said, "Greetings, highly favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." When she saw him, she was troubled at what he said and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end."*

We have, in these verses, the announcement of the most marvelous event that ever happened in this world, the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It reveals the true meaning of Christmas. It is a passage which we should always read with wonder, love and praise not only at this time of year, but at all times.

We should notice, in the first place, the lowly and unassuming manner in which the Savior of mankind came to live among us. The angel who announced his advent was sent to an obscure town of Galilee, named Nazareth. The woman, who was honored to be our Lord's mother, was evidently in a lowly position of life. Both in her social and economic status and her house, there was a nothing of what the world calls "greatness."

We need not hesitate to conclude that there was a wise providence in all this arrangement. The plan of Almighty God, which orders all things in heaven and earth, could just as easily have appointed Jerusalem to be the place of Mary's residence as Nazareth, or could as easily have chosen the daughter of some rich scribe to be our Lord's mother, as a poor woman. But it seemed good to him that it should not be so. The first advent of Messiah was to be an advent of humility. That humility was to begin even from the time of his conception and birth.

Let us admire the amazing sacrifice of the Son of God. The heir of all things not only took our nature upon him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed. It would have been a sacrifice to come on earth as a king and reign. It was a miracle of mercy passing our comprehension to come on earth as a poor man, to be despised, and suffer, and die. Let his love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to him. Let his example daily bring home to our mind the precept of Scripture, "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with those of low position." (Romans 12:16)

We should notice, in the second place, the high privilege given to Mary. The language which the angel Gabriel addresses to her is very remarkable. He calls her "highly favored." He tells her that "the Lord is with her." He says to her, "Blessed are you among women."

No woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only out of the countless millions of the human race, could be the means whereby God could be "manifest in the flesh," and Mary had the mighty privilege of being that one. By one woman, sin and death were brought into the world at the beginning. By the child-bearing of one woman, life and immortality were brought to light when Christ was born. No wonder that this one woman was called "highly favored" and "blessed" to have such a privilege.

One thing in connection with this subject should never be forgotten by Christians. There is a relationship to Christ within reach of all of us, a relationship far nearer than that of flesh and blood, a relationship which belongs to all who repent and believe. "Whoever does the will of God," says Jesus, "is the one who is my brother, and sister, and mother." "Blessed is the womb that bore you," was the saying of a woman one day. But what was the reply? "Yes! rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (Mark 3:35; Luke 11:27)

We should notice, finally, in these verses, the glorious account of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the angel gives to Mary. Every part of the account is full of deep meaning and deserves close attention. Jesus "shall be called the Son of the Most High," says Gabriel. He was so before he came into the world. Equal to the Father in all things, he was from all eternity the Son of God. But he was to be known and acknowledged as such by his followers, the church. The Messiah was to be recognized and worshiped as nothing less than one who is truly God.

"The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David," says Gabriel, "and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever." The literal fulfillment of this part of the promise is yet to come. Israel is yet to be gathered. The Jews are yet to be restored to their own land and to look on him whom they had pierced as their King and their God. Though the accomplishment of this prediction is delayed, we may confidently wait for it. It shall surely come one day.

Finally, says Gabriel, "and his kingdom will have no end." Before his glorious kingdom, the empires of this world shall one day go down and pass away. Like Nineveh, and Babylon, and Tyre, and Carthage, they shall all come to nothing one day, and the saints of the most high shall take the kingdom. Before Jesus, every knee shall one day bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. His kingdom alone shall prove an everlasting kingdom and his dominion shall not pass away. (Daniel 7:14, 27)

Christmas is not just a time of looking backward at what Jesus did when he was on earth, but also looking forward to what he will do in the future for us. As Christians, we should think often about this glorious promise and take comfort in its contents. The day draws near when Christ shall take his great power and reign and when all who have served him faithfully shall exchange a cross for a crown. This will all take place because the Son of God was willing to be born of a woman. And become a man for us. That is something worth celebrating!

Day 8  
Luke 1:34-38

*Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, that holy child whom you will bear will be called the Son of God. And, behold, your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." The angel departed from her.*

Let us notice first, in these verses, the question of Mary to the angel Gabriel. It is not a question of doubt, "I can't believe this is possible so how can this be since I am a virgin?" Rather it is a question of faith, "I believe you so how is this going to be accomplished since I am a virgin?" Mary's question was very different from Zechariah's "How shall I know this for sure?" Zechariah wanted a confirmation so he could believe the angel. Mary wanted understanding since she already believed. Asking God to show us what he is doing when we trust whatever he says he will do is acceptable to God. Asking God to prove to us he can do whatever he says he will do before we will believe is not acceptable to God. Christmas is a time to remember the importance of faith and trust in the promises of God. This faith Mary displayed.

Another thing to notice is the reverent and careful manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ's incarnation. In reply to the question of Mary "How can this be?" he uses these remarkable words, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." There is a mystery in Christmas, the mystery of the incarnation.

We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. It is enough for us to know that "the Word was made flesh," and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real "body was prepared for him," so that he "took part of our flesh and blood," and was "born of a woman." (John 1:14; Hebrews 10:5; Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 4:4) The manner in which all this was accomplished is wisely hidden from us. In a faith which comes down from heaven there must by necessity be mysteries, things that we cannot understand. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation, the union of the human and divine in Christ, is one. At the heart of Christmas is this incredible mystery, God became a man.

Let us notice, in the third place, the prominent place assigned to the Holy Spirit in the great mystery of the incarnation. We find it written, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." An intelligent reader of the Bible will probably not fail to remember, that the honor here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. In every step of the great work of man's redemption, we shall find special mention of the work of the Holy Spirit. Did Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written that "through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God." (Hebrews 9:14) Did He rise again for our justification? It is written that he "was made alive by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18) Does He supply his disciples with comfort between the time of his first and second coming? It is written that the Comforter, whom he promised to send is "the Spirit of truth." (John 14:17)

We often do not think of the Holy Spirit at this time of year concerning his involvement in that first Christmas, but we should. The Holy Spirit plays a major role in the birth of Christ and in our daily lives. Let us give the Holy Spirit the same place in our personal faith, which we find him



occupying in God's word. Let us remember, that all that believers have, and are, and enjoy under the Gospel, they owe to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity is equally and entirely needful to the salvation of every saved person. The election of God the Father, the redemption of God the Son, and the sanctification of God the Spirit, should never to be separated in our Christianity.

Let us notice, in the fourth place, the mighty principle which the angel Gabriel lays down to silence all objections about the incarnation, "with God nothing shall be impossible." A hearty reception of this great principle is of immense importance to our own inward peace. Questions and doubts will often arise in men's minds about many subjects in Christianity. They are the natural result of the fallen state of our soul. Our faith at the best is very feeble. Our knowledge at its highest is clouded with much weakness. And among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now, a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Let us notice, in the last place, the humble and ready agreement of Mary in God's revealed will concerning her. She says to the angel, "Behold the servant of the Lord, may it be to me according to your word."

There is far more of admirable grace in this answer than at first sight appears. A moment's reflection will show us, that it was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard of and mysterious way. It brought with it, no doubt, at a distant period great honor; but it brought with it for the present no small danger to Mary's reputation, and no small trial to Mary's faith. All this danger and trial Mary was willing and ready to risk. She asks no further questions. She raises no further objections. She accepts the honor given to her with all its attendant perils and inconveniences. "Behold," she says, "the servant of the Lord."

Let us seek in our daily lives to exercise the same blessed spirit of faith which we see here in Mary as she began her journey toward the first Christmas. Let us be willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God's will is clear and the path of responsibility is plain from the Scriptures.

## The Mother of Jesus

Day 9 Luke 1:39-45

Day 10 Luke 1:46-56

Day 9  
Luke 1:39-45

*Mary arose in those days and went with haste into the hill country into a town of Judah and entered into the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke out with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. How has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"*

We should observe in this passage, the benefit of fellowship and communion between believers. We read of a visit paid by Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. We are told in a striking manner how the hearts of both these holy women were cheered, and their minds lifted up by this encounter. Without this visit, Elizabeth might never have been so filled with the Holy Spirit, as we are here told she was, and Mary might never have uttered that song of praise which is now known all over the Church of Jesus Christ. The first Christmas was a time when those who would participate in the birth of the messiah would come together and strengthen and encourage each other. Mary wanted to be with Elizabeth during this time, to share with her the incredible news from the angel Gabriel and in turn, she would receive the news Elizabeth had from that same angel. It was a time of great rejoicing between these two as believers in the one true God.

We should always regard communion with other believers as an important way of experiencing God's grace especially at Christmas time. Christmas is a celebration among believers in Jesus Christ. Communion with other Christians is always a refreshing break in our journey along the narrow way; it is a blessing to exchange experience with our fellow travelers. It helps us and it helps them, and so is a mutual gain. It is the nearest approach that we can make on earth to the joy of heaven. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17) We need reminding of this. The subject does not receive sufficient attention and the souls of believers suffer in consequence. There are many who fear the Lord and think upon his name, and yet forget to speak often to one another. First let us seek the face of God. Then let us seek the face of God's children. If we did this more, and were more careful about the people we spend time with, we would know more often what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We should observe in this passage, the clear spiritual knowledge which appears in the language of Elizabeth. She uses an expression about Mary which shows that she herself was deeply taught of God. She calls her "the mother of my Lord." Those words "my Lord" are so familiar to our ears, that we miss the fullness of their meaning. At the time they were spoken they implied far more than we are likely to suppose. They were nothing less than a distinct declaration that the child who was to be born of the virgin Mary was the long promised Messiah, the "Lord" of whom David in spirit had prophesied, the Christ of God. Viewed in this light, the expression is a wonderful example of faith. It is a confession worthy to be placed by the side of that of Peter, when he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ."

Notice, Elizabeth does not declare that Mary is "the mother of God," but "the mother of my Lord." There is an important distinction here. Mary was to be the mother of the human Jesus, who joined together with his divine nature was the one person, Jesus Christ, the messiah.

Let us remember the deep meaning of the words, "the Lord," and beware of using them lightly and carelessly. Let us consider that they rightly apply to no one but him alone who was crucified for our sins on Calvary. Let the recollection of this fact invest those words with a holy reverence, and make us careful how we let them fall from our lips. There are two texts connected with the expression which should often come to our minds. In one it is written, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) In the other it is written, "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:11)

Finally, we should observe in these verses, the high praise which Elizabeth bestows upon Mary's simple faith. "Blessed," she says, "is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" We need not wonder that this holy woman should thus commend faith. No doubt she was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. She knew the great things that faith had done. What is the whole history of God's saints in every age but a record of men and women who trusted God? What is the simple story of all from Abel downwards but a narrative of redeemed sinners who believed what God had revealed to them, and so were blessed?

By faith they embraced promises. By faith they lived. By faith they walked. By faith they endured hardships. By faith they looked to an unseen Savior, and good things yet to come. By faith they battled with the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith they overcame, and got safely home. Of this godly company Mary was proving herself one. It is no wonder that Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Do we know anything of this precious faith? This, after all, is the question that concerns us. Do we know anything of the faith of God's elect, the faith which is the working of God? Let us never rest until we know it by experience. Once knowing it, let us never cease to pray that our faith may grow exceedingly. It is better to be rich in faith than rich in gold. When the great white throne appears, and the books are opened, when the dead are called from their graves, and receiving their final sentence, the value of faith will at length be fully known. Men who have not believed will see the believers standing with the Lord and will learn then, how true are the words, "Blessed are those who believed." As believers have declared by faith the truth of Jesus Christ in that first Christmas and every succeeding Christmas on this earth since that time, we will one day declare that truth by sight when we are in the presence of Jesus Christ himself. What a glorious day that will be!

Day 10  
Luke 1:46-56

*Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded the humble estate of his servant, for, behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me and his name is holy. His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her own home.*

One of the central individuals in the first Christmas is, of course, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Most likely, she was a teenager at the time, but a young woman of great faith. Her faith rested upon the Old Testament Scriptures, the revelation of God about himself and his relationship to his people. These verses contain Mary's famous song of praise, as she rejoiced in becoming the "mother of our Lord."

Let us mark, firstly, the full acquaintance with Scripture which her song displays. We are reminded as we read it, of many expressions in the book of Psalms. Above all, we are reminded of the song of Hannah, in the book of Samuel. (1 Samuel 2) It is evident that the Mary's memory was a storehouse of Scripture. She was familiar, whether by hearing or by reading, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke, she gave expression to her feelings in Scriptural language. Moved by the Holy Spirit to break forth into praise, she chose language which the Holy Spirit had already consecrated and used.

Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture. Let us study it, search into it, dig into it, and meditate on it, until it dwells in us richly. (Colossians 3:16) In particular, let us labor to make ourselves familiar with those parts of the Bible which, like the book of Psalms, describe the experience of the saints of old. We shall find it most helpful to us in all our approaches to God. It will supply us with the best and most suitable language both for the expression of our needs and thanksgivings. Such knowledge of the Bible can doubtless never be attained without regular study. But the time spent on such study is never misspent. It will bear fruit all of our days on this earth.

Let us mark, secondly, in this song of praise, Mary's deep humility. She who was chosen of God to the high honor of being Messiah's mother, speaks of her own "humble estate," and acknowledges her need of a "Savior." She does not anywhere say that she regarded herself as a sinless person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to sense her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Savior for her own soul. Let us remember that she was a human being like ourselves and like ourselves was saved by grace through faith in the Son of God.

Let us copy this holy humility of our Lord's mother. Like her, let us be lowly in our own eyes, and think little of ourselves. Humility is the highest grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is the grace, which of all is most important for human nature. Above all, it is the grace which is

within the reach of every saved person. All are not rich. All are not learned. All are not highly gifted. All are not preachers. But all children of God may be clothed with humility.

Let us mark, thirdly, the lively thankfulness of Mary. It stands out prominently in the early part of her song. Her "soul magnifies the Lord." Her "spirit rejoices in God." "All generations shall call her blessed." "Great things have been done for her." We can scarcely enter into the full extent of feelings which a holy Jewish young woman would experience on finding herself in Mary's position. But we should try to understand them as we read her repeated expressions of praise. We too shall do well to walk in Mary's steps in this matter, and cultivate a thankful spirit. It has ever been a mark of God's most distinguished saints in every age.

Let us mark, fourthly, the experiential acquaintance with God's former dealings with his people, which Mary possessed. She speaks of God as One whose "mercy is on those who fear him," as one who "scatters the proud, and puts down the mighty, and sends the rich away empty," as one who "exalts those of humble estate and fills the hungry with good things." She spoke out of her knowledge of Old Testament history. She remembered how Israel's God had put down Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and then the Canaanites and the Philistines. She remembered how he had exalted Joseph and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel, and never allowed his chosen people to be completely destroyed. And now God was placing honor upon a poor woman of Nazareth in raising up the Messiah in Israel.

Let us mark, lastly, the firm grasp which Mary had of Bible promises. She ends her song of praise by declaring that God has "blessed Israel in remembrance of his mercy," and that he has done "as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever." These words show clearly that she remembered the past promise made to Abraham, "In you shall all nations of the earth be blessed." And it is evident that in the approaching birth of her Son she regarded this promise as about to be fulfilled.

Let us learn from this holy woman's example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance for our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the spiritual manna that we should eat daily, and the water that we should drink daily, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We walk by faith, and this faith leans on promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. We shall find one day, like the Mary, that God keeps his word, and that what he has spoken, so he will always perform in due time. Christmas time should be a special time of reflecting on the great promises of God given in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Jesus, his Son, as recorded in the New Testament.

The Birth of the Forerunner of Jesus

Day 11 Luke 1:57-66

Day 12 Luke 1:67-80

Day 11  
Luke 1:57-66

*Now Elizabeth's time came to give birth and she bore a son. Her neighbors and her relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her and they rejoiced with her. It came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child and they were going to call him Zechariah, after the name of his father. But his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "There is no one of your relatives that is called by this name."*

*They made signs to his father as to what he would have him called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marveled at this. His mouth was opened immediately and his tongue loosed and he spoke and praised God. Fear came on all who lived around them and all these things were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What manner of child shall this be! For the hand of the Lord was with him."*

The celebration of Christmas is a celebration not only of the grace of God, but also of the mercy of God. God's mercy can be defined as "relieving the misery and suffering of believers" and God's grace can be defined as "blessing believers resulting in their joy." On that first Christmas God showed his mercy to Zechariah and Elizabeth as he relieved their suffering of being childless and he showed his grace by blessing them with a child which made them so joyful.

We have in this passage the history of a birth, the birth of a burning and shining light in the redemptive plan of God, the forerunner of Jesus Christ himself, John the Baptist. The language in which the Holy Spirit describes the event is well worthy of a comment. It is written that "The Lord showed great mercy to Elizabeth." There was mercy in bringing her safely through her time of trial. There was mercy in making her the mother of a living child. Happy are those family circles, whose births are viewed in this light, as special instances of "the mercy" of the Lord.

As we celebrate the grace and mercy of God at Christmas, we do not do it alone. We do it within the context of our families. Although, many of our family members may not know Jesus Christ or care about his birth, we do and we can show love to them as a result of the love we have experienced from Christ. But we can also receive love from them because as Christians we understand the importance of the family in God's plan for society. In that first Christmas, Elizabeth experienced the love of her family and friends as they rejoiced in the coming birth of her son.

We see in the conduct of Elizabeth's neighbors and cousins, a striking example of the kindness we owe to one another. It is written that "They rejoiced with her." How much more happiness there would be in this evil world, if conduct like that of Elizabeth's relatives was more common! Sympathy in one another's joys and sorrows costs little, and yet is a very powerful mercy and grace in life. A kind word of congratulations or consolation is seldom forgotten.

The servant of Christ will do well to remember this grace. Let us not forget that it is urged upon us by a special precept, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15) The practice of it seems to bring down a special blessing. The Jews who came to comfort Mary and Martha at Bethany, saw the greatest miracle that Jesus ever worked when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Our Lord was ready both to go to a marriage feast and to weep at a grave. (John 2, John 11) Let us also be ready to go and do the same in the lives of others



especially during this Christmas season when we celebrate the grace and mercy of God in sending his Son to redeem us from our sins.

We see in the conduct of Zechariah in this passage, a striking example of the benefit of affliction. He resists the wishes of his relatives to call his newborn son after his own name. He clings firmly to the name "John," by which the angel Gabriel had commanded him to be called. He shows that his nine months without the ability to speak had not been inflicted on him in vain. He is no longer doubting God, but trusting God. He now believes every word that Gabriel had spoken to him, and every word of his message shall be obeyed. We need not doubt that the past nine months had been a most profitable time spiritually for Zechariah. He had learned, probably, more about his own heart and about God, than he ever knew before. His conduct shows it. Correction had proved instructive. Let us take heed that affliction does us good, as it did to Zechariah.

We see in the early history of John the Baptist the nature of the blessing that we should desire for all young children. We read that "the hand of the Lord was with him." We are not told distinctly what these words mean. We are left to gather their meaning from the promise that went before John's birth and the life that John lived all his days. But we need not doubt that the hand of the Lord was with John to sanctify and renew his heart, to teach and prepare him for his office as a prophet, to strengthen him for all his work as the forerunner of the Lamb of God, to encourage him in all his bold denunciation of men's sins, and to comfort him in his last hours, when he was murdered in prison. We need not doubt that from his earliest years the grace of the Holy Spirit appeared in his ways. In his boyhood as well as in his manhood the mighty hand of God was on him.

This is the blessing that we ought to seek for our children. They will not be John the Baptists, but they have been born into a Christian family will thus have the "hand of the Lord on them." We should pray diligently that God works in their lives and they embrace him by faith as John did when he was old enough. We teach our children at Christmas about the birth of our Lord and how God blessed Mary and Joseph with a son who would be Savior of the world. We should also teach our children about trusting that Savior who grew up and died on the cross for our sins. Every day is a day that we need to trust the Lord not only in the wintertime during the Christmas celebration, but every day throughout the year. Then we and our children will know the full blessing of the Lord's hand upon us.

Day 12  
Luke 1:67-80

*Now Elizabeth's time came to give birth and she bore a son. Her neighbors and her relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her and they rejoiced with her. It came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child and they were going to call him Zechariah, after the name of his father. But his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "There is no one of your relatives that is called by this name."*

*They made signs to his father as to what he would have him called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marveled at this. His mouth was opened immediately and his tongue loosed and he spoke and praised God. Fear came on all who lived around them and all these things were talked about throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What manner of child shall this be! For the hand of the Lord was with him."*

The celebration of Christmas is a celebration not only of the grace of God, but also of the mercy of God. God's mercy can be defined as "relieving the misery and suffering of believers" and God's grace can be defined as "blessing believers resulting in their joy." On that first Christmas God showed his mercy to Zechariah and Elizabeth as he relieved their suffering of being childless and he showed his grace by blessing them with a child which made them so joyful. Let us now read the thanksgiving of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. We should notice, firstly, the deep thankfulness of a Jewish believer's heart in the prospect of Messiah's appearing. Praise is the first word that falls from the mouth of Zechariah as soon as his speechlessness is removed and his tongue restored. He begins with the same expression with which Paul begins several of his epistles, "Blessed be the Lord."

At this period of the world we can hardly understand the depth of this godly man's feelings. We must imagine ourselves in his position. We must fancy ourselves seeing the fulfillment of the oldest promise in the Old Testament, the promise of a Savior, and seeing the accomplishment of this promise brought near to our own door. We must try to realize what a dim and imperfect view men had of the Gospel before Christ actually appeared when the shadows and types passed away. Then perhaps we may have some idea of the feelings of Zechariah when he cried out, "Blessed be the Lord."

We should notice, secondly, in this hymn of praise, how much emphasis Zechariah lays on God's fulfillment of his promises. He declares that God has "visited and redeemed his people," as a thing already accomplished because it is sure to take place. He goes on to proclaim the instrument of this redemption, "a horn of salvation." A horn is a symbol of strength on an animal. Jesus would be a strong and powerful Savior of the house of David. And then he adds that all this is done, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophet, to perform the mercy promised, to remember his holy covenant, and the oath which he swore to our father Abraham.

It is clear that the souls of Old Testament believers fed much on God's promises. They were obliged to walk by faith far more than we are. They knew nothing of the great facts which we know about Christ's life, and death, and resurrection. They looked forward to redemption as a thing hoped for, but not yet seen, and their only warrant for their hope was God's covenanted word. Their faith is a great example to us.

Let us learn to rest on God's promises and embrace them as Zechariah did. Let us not doubt that every word of God about his people concerning future things shall as surely be fulfilled as every word about them has been fulfilled concerning past things. Their safety is secured by promise. The world, the flesh, and the devil, shall never prevail against any believer. Their acquittal at the last day is secured by promise. They shall not come into condemnation, but shall be presented spotless before the Father's throne. Their final glory is secured by promise.

Their Savior shall come again the second time, as surely as he came the first, to gather his saints together and to give them a crown of righteousness. Let us be persuaded of these promises. Let us embrace them and not let them go. They will never fail us. God's word is never broken. He is not a man that he should lie. We have a seal on every promise which Zechariah never saw. We have the seal of Christ's death to assure us, that what God has promised God will perform.

We should notice, thirdly, in this hymn, what clear views of Christ's kingdom Zechariah possessed. He speaks of being saved and delivered from the hands of enemies, as if he had in view a temporal kingdom and a temporal deliverer from Gentile power. But he does not stop here. He declares that the kingdom of Messiah is a kingdom in which his people are to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him. This kingdom, he proclaimed, was drawing near. Prophets had long foretold that it would one day be set up. In the birth of his son, John the Baptist, and the near approach of Christ, Zechariah saw this kingdom close at hand.

Jesus was introducing the kingdom in spiritual form and would one day return to transform it into a physical form when he reigns. Small as the spiritual kingdom seems now, it will be great and glorious one day. The men and women who have served God in "holiness and righteousness" shall one day see all things put under them. Every enemy shall be subdued, and they shall reign forever in that new heaven and earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

We should notice, finally, what clear views of doctrine Zechariah enjoyed. He ends his hymn of praise by addressing his infant son John the Baptist. He foretells that John shall go before the Messiah and announce the salvation that Messiah is about to bring in, a salvation which is full of grace and mercy, a salvation of which the leading privileges are forgiveness of sins, light, and peace. Christmas is a time to remind ourselves of what we have experienced as those who have turned from our sin and trusted Christ to save us, forgiveness of sins, the light of the truth of the Gospel and peace with God. What a privilege and reason to celebrate Christmas.

6

## The Stepfather of Jesus

Day 13 Matthew 1:18-25

Day 13  
Matthew 1:18-25

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, did not want to shame her and desired to divorce her privately. While he was thinking about these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the one conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son and will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

*Now all this was done so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Immanuel," (which translated means God with us). When Joseph awoke from his sleep he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary as his wife. But he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son and he called his name Jesus.*

Much of the focus at Christmas is on Mary and the child Jesus. Christians often forget about Joseph, the man God chose to care for and protect the mother of his Son and lead her to Bethlehem in very difficult circumstances to birth the messiah.

Let us observe the conduct of Joseph described in these verses. It is a beautiful example of godly wisdom and tender consideration for others. When Mary received the angelic revelation of her impending pregnancy, Joseph was not with her. At that time in Israel, men and women were officially married in a legal ceremony one year before they were allowed to "come together" (i.e. live together and consummate the marriage). Mary's pregnancy looked like she had been unfaithful to Joseph.

Joseph saw her pregnancy and naturally assumed Mary had been unfaithful. But he did nothing rashly because he loved her and wanted to treat her properly in this process even though he must have been deeply distraught. He waited patiently and in all probability laid the matter before God in prayer as to what he should do.

The patience of Joseph was graciously rewarded. He received a direct message from God upon the subject of his anxiety, and was at once relieved from all his fears. How good it is to wait upon God! Who has cast his cares upon God in conscientious prayer and found him a failure? Proverbs says "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:6)

Although God does not normally answer our prayers today through angelic visions as he did those who had direct roles in his redemptive plan, he does answer our prayers as faithfully as he did Joseph's.

Let us next observe the two names given to our Lord in these verses. One is "Jesus." The other is "Immanuel." One describes his office; the other his nature. Both are deeply interesting. The name "Jesus" means "Savior." It is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. It is given to our Lord because "He saves his people from their sins." This is his special office. He saves them from the guilt of sin, by his own atoning blood. He saves them from the dominion of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin, when, in the future, he takes them out of this world to rest with him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when he shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed and holy

are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved. But they are saved from sin forever. They are cleansed from guilt by Christ's blood. They are made fit for heaven by Christ's Spirit. This is salvation. He who holds onto his sin is not yet saved.

Jesus is a very encouraging name to heavily burdened sinners. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords might lawfully have taken some more high-sounding title. But He does not do so. The rulers of this world have often called themselves Great, Conquerors, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God is content to call himself Savior. The people who desire salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness, and have access with confidence through Christ. It is his ministry and his delight to show mercy. "For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." (John 3:17)

The other name in these verses is also important. It is the name which is given to our Lord from his nature, as God manifest in the flesh. He is called "Immanuel," which is "God with us." Let us take care that we have clear views of our Lord Jesus Christ's nature and person. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds, that our Savior is perfect man as well as perfect God, and perfect God as well as perfect man. If we once lose sight of this great foundation truth, we may run into dreadful heresies. The name Immanuel takes in the whole mystery. Jesus is "God with us." He had a nature like our own in all things, except sin. But though Jesus was "with us" in human flesh and blood, he was at the same time truly God.

We shall often find, as we read the Gospels that our Savior could be weary, and hungry, and thirsty, could weep, and groan, and feel pain like ourselves. In all this we see the man Christ Jesus. We see the nature he took on him, when he was born of Mary.

But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Savior knew men's hearts and thoughts, that he had power over demons, that he could work the mightiest of miracles with a word, that he was ministered to by angels, that he allowed a disciple to call him "my God," and that he said, "Before Abraham was I am," and "I and my Father are one." In all this we see the eternal God.

At Christmas, Christians celebrate the true identity of that babe born in a manger to a poor and humble family from Nazareth. We celebrate Jesus, the God-man, who came to bear our sins on the cross and redeem us, the people whom he loves.

## The Birth of Jesus

DAY 14 Luke 2:1-7  
DAY 15 Luke 2:8-20  
DAY 16 Luke 2:11

Day 14  
Luke 2:1-7

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of the whole Roman world. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be registered, everyone to his own town. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be registered with Mary his espoused wife who was pregnant. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. She bore her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.*

We have, in these verses, the story of the first Christmas, the birth of the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Every birth of a living child is a marvelous event. It brings into being a person that will never die. But never since the world began was a birth so marvelous as the birth of Christ. In itself it was a miracle, "God was revealed in the flesh." (1 Timothy 3:16)

In reading these verses, let us first notice the times when Christ was born. It was in the days when Augustus, the first Roman emperor, made "a decree that a census should be taken of the whole Roman world."

The wisdom of God appears in this simple fact. The Jews were under the dominion and taxation of a foreign power. Strangers were ruling over them. They no longer had a fully independent government of their own. The "due time" had come for the promised Messiah to appear. Augustus takes a census to tax the Roman world, and at once Christ is born.

It was a time peculiarly suitable for the introduction of Christ's Gospel. The whole civilized earth was at length governed by one master, Rome. There was nothing to prevent missionaries of a new faith going from city to city, and country to country. Egypt, and Assyria, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, had all successively proven by their worldly wisdom that they "did not know God." (1 Corinthians 1:21) Notwithstanding their mighty conquerors, and poets, and historians, and architects, and philosophers, the kingdoms of the world were full of dark idolatry. It was indeed "due time" for God to intervene from heaven, and send down an almighty Savior. It was "due time" for Christ to be born.

Let us ever rest our souls on the thought that the times are in God's hand. (Psalm 31:15) He knows the best season for sending help to his people, and new light to the world. Let us beware of giving way to anxiety about the course of events around us, as if we knew better than the King of kings what time relief should come.

Let us notice, secondly, the place where Christ was born. It was not at Nazareth of Galilee, where his mother, Mary, lived. The prophet Micah had foretold that the event was to take place at Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) And so it came to pass. At Bethlehem Christ was born. The overruling providence of God appears in this simple fact. He orders all things in heaven and earth. He turns the hearts of kings wherever he will. He overruled the time when Augustus decreed the census. He directed the enforcement of the decree in such a way, that Mary needed to be at Bethlehem when "the time came for the baby to be born." Little did the proud Roman emperor, and his officer Quirinius, know that they were only instruments in the hand of the God of Israel, and were only carrying out the eternal purposes of the King of kings. Little did they know that they were



helping to lay the foundation of a kingdom, before which the empires of this world would all go down one day, and Roman idolatry pass away.

The heart of a believer should take comfort in the recollection of God's providential governing of the world. A true Christian should never be greatly moved or disturbed by the conduct of the rulers of the earth. He should see with the eye of faith a hand overruling all that they do to the praise and glory of God. Kings and rulers can do nothing but what God allows, and nothing which is not carrying out God's will. God does allow man to exercise free will and commit evil, but he always turns it to his purposes.

Let us notice, lastly, the manner in which Christ was born. He was not born under the roof of his mother's house, but in a strange place, and at an "inn." When born, he was not laid in a carefully prepared cradle. He was "laid in a manger" (that is, a feeding trough for the cattle), because there was no room in the inn.

We see here the grace and humility of Christ. Had he come to save mankind with royal majesty, surrounded by his Father's angels, it would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had he chosen to dwell in a palace, with power and great authority, we should have had reason enough to wonder. But to become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest, this is a love that passes knowledge. Never let us forget that through this humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to share in his glory. Through his life of suffering, as well as his death, he has obtained eternal redemption for us. All through his life he was poor for our sakes, from the hour of his birth to the hour of his death. And through his poverty we are made rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

There are many who fill their houses with Christmas decorations and spare no expense at this time of the year, but they have completely neglected the very person whose birth is being celebrated. For believers, Christmas is a time to fill our minds and homes with thoughts of Jesus. Talk often at this time of year about our Lord and the true meaning of his birth and it will truly be a time of celebration that honors him and our Father who sent him.

Day 15  
Luke 2:8-20

*And there were shepherds in the same region abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were very afraid. And the angel said to them, "Do not fear, for, behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign to you: you shall find a baby wrapped in 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 and good will towards men."*

*And it came about when the angels went from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass which the Lord has revealed to us." And they went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they had seen this, they made known the statement, which was told to them about this child. And all who heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them.*

We read, in these verses, how the birth of the Lord Jesus was first announced to human beings. Throughout history, the birth of a king's son is generally made an occasion of public celebration and rejoicing. Everywhere one went on that day people would be talking about the newborn prince. However, on that first Christmas the announcement of the birth of the Prince of Peace was made privately to a small group of people, at midnight, and without any worldly pomp and circumstance.

Let us point out who they were to whom the news first came that Christ was born. They were "shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks by night." To shepherds, not to priests and rulers, to shepherds, not to Scribes and Pharisees, an angel appeared, proclaiming, "to you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The saying of James should come into our mind, as we read these words "Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him." (James 2:5) The lack of money prevents no one from spiritual privileges. The things of God's kingdom are often hidden from the great and noble, and revealed to the poor and humble. "Working with one's hands" for a living does not prevent a man from being favored with special communion with God. Moses was keeping sheep, Gideon was threshing wheat, Elisha was ploughing, when they were each honored by direct calls and revelations from God. Let us resist the suggestion of Satan that Christianity is not for the common person. The weak of the world are often called before the mighty. The last are often first, and the first last. This is all because of God's incredible grace.

Let us point out, secondly, the language used by the angel in announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds. He said, "I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all people." We need not wonder at these words. The spiritual darkness which had covered the earth for four thousand years, was about to be rolled away. The way to pardon and peace with God was about to be

thrown open to all mankind. The head of Satan was about to be crushed. Liberty was about to be proclaimed to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind.

The mighty truth was about to be proclaimed that God could be just, and yet, for Christ's sake, justify the ungodly. Salvation was no longer to be seen through types and figures, but openly, and face to face. The knowledge of God was no longer to be confined to the Jews, but to be offered to the whole Gentile world. The days of heathenism were numbered. The first stone of God's kingdom was about to be set up. If this was not "good news," there never was news that deserved the name.

Thirdly, who were they who first praised God, when Christ was born? They were angels and not men, angels who had never sinned, and needed no Savior, angels who had not fallen, and required no redeemer, and no atoning blood. The first hymn to the honor of "God manifest in the flesh," was sung by "a multitude of the heavenly host."

Let us note this fact. It shows us what good servants the angels are. All that their heavenly Master does pleases and interests them. It shows us what clear knowledge they have. They know what misery sin has brought into creation. They know the blessedness of heaven, and the privilege of an open door into it. Above all, it shows us the deep love and compassion which the angels feel towards poor lost man. They rejoice in the glorious prospect of many souls being saved.

Let us point out, fourthly, the hymn of praise which the heavenly host sung in the hearing of the shepherds. They said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards men."

"Glory to God in the highest!" the song begins. Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of his Son Jesus Christ in the world. By his life and death on the cross he will glorify God's attributes of justice, holiness, grace, mercy, and wisdom, as they never were glorified before. Creation glorified God, but not so much as redemption.

"Peace on earth!" the song goes on. Now is come to earth the peace of God which passes all understanding, the perfect peace between a holy God and sinful man, which Christ was to purchase with his own blood, the peace which is offered freely to all mankind, the peace which, once admitted into the heart, makes men live at peace one with another, and will one day spread over the whole world.

"Good will towards men!" the song concludes. Now is come the time when God's kindness and good will towards guilty man is to be fully made known. His power was seen in creation. His justice was seen in the flood. But his mercy remained to be fully revealed by the appearing and atonement of Jesus Christ. Such was the meaning of the angels' song. Happy are they that can enter into its meaning, and with their hearts subscribe to its contents.

Let us point out before we leave the passage, the prompt obedience to the heavenly vision displayed by the shepherds. We see in them no doubts, or questionings, or hesitation. Strange and improbable as the news might seem, they at once act upon them. They went to Bethlehem in haste. They found everything exactly as it had been told them. Their simple faith received a rich reward. They had the mighty privilege of being the first of all mankind, after Mary and Joseph, who saw with believing eyes the new-born Messiah. They soon returned, "glorifying and praising God" for what they had seen.

During this Christmas, may our spirit be like theirs! May we ever believe implicitly, act promptly, and wait for nothing, when the path of obedience is clear! In so doing, we shall have a reward like that of the shepherds. The journey that is begun in faith will end in praise.

Day 16  
Luke 2:11

*For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.*

The words that the angel spoke to the shepherds on that first Christmas concerning the true identity of that babe born in Bethlehem cannot be over emphasized. He said, "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." The angel announced three titles for Jesus, brief and concise, but powerful identifications of his true nature.

First, he is called the "Savior." This is a title that God alone claimed for himself in the OT. In Isaiah 43:11-12, the Lord says "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Savior. I have declared and have saved and I have proclaimed when there was no foreign god among you. Therefore, you are my witnesses that I am God." God was reminding Israel that he alone was their Savior and deliverer. They had foolishly fallen into idolatry and depending on foreign gods to protect them, but none of those gods were real and thus none of them could save anyone. When the angel proclaimed that Jesus was the Savior, he was proclaiming that Jesus was the God of the Old testament who have delivered them time and time again from their physical enemies and who was this time going to deliver them from their greatest enemy, sin.

The second title the angel gave for Jesus was the "Christ," the "anointed messiah." Christ is the English translation of the Greek word "Christos" which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, "messiah." Jesus was the one for whom the Israelites had been waiting. The prophets had foretold many things about the messiah and his future coming. Genesis 12:1-3 foretold that he would be a descendant of Abraham. Genesis 49:10 predicted that he would be of the tribe of Judah. 2 Samuel 7:12-16 indicated that he would be a descendant of David. Isaiah 7:14 said that he would be born of a virgin. Micah 5:2 foretold that he would be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah 11:2 predicted that he would be anointed by the Spirit. Isaiah 35:5-6 indicated that messiah would perform incredible healing miracles. Isaiah 53 predicted that he would suffer and die for our sins. Psalm 16:8-11 said that the messiah would not stay in the grave after he died. Psalm 110:1 foretold that the messiah would ascend to the right hand of God. Jesus proved he was the messiah by fulfilling these messianic prophecies and many more.

Jesus was anointed by God to deliver his people from sin and set up his righteous kingdom. In Matthew 16:16 Peter declares to Jesus "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." That was Peter's declaration of faith that he believed that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah of Israel who had come to deliver God's people and set up his kingdom. Because the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their messiah, Jesus instituted the spiritual form of the kingdom of God and brought the Jew and Gentile together as one, united to him and to each other by faith in Christ. One day Jesus will return and set up his physical kingdom and rule on the earth.

The third title used of Jesus by the angel was "the Lord." The Greek word used here is "kurios" which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." When the angel uses this term "Lord," he is saying that this child is the Lord, Jehovah of the Old Testament come in the flesh. Jesus revealed to us that God was a trinity. There were three persons in one God. Each person, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is Jehovah God. The Son of God was the person in the godhead that became a man. He was God in the flesh. How can we even describe what that means? It is far beyond our comprehension.

Everything that Jesus accomplished for us was based on who he was. Why is having a relationship with Jesus Christ so great? It is because of who he is. If a famous person whom you admire met you and wanted to spend time with you, you would be very excited. Why? It is because of who he or she is. It is the same with Jesus. Jesus is the greatest human being that ever lived. He is our Savior, our messiah, and our God and he loves us with an infinite love that never ends. What more could we ask from someone?

It's hard for our human minds to grasp the enormity of that three-fold description of a baby born in a manger on that first Christmas, but that is who Jesus was and is. It is so important at Christmas to focus on the true identity of that babe born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago and remember that we have a love relationship with him that strengthens and encourages us every day and will one day bring us into a glorious future with him.

## The Consecration of Jesus

Day 17 Luke 2:21-24

Day 18 Luke 2:25-35

Day 19 Luke 2:36-40

Day 17  
Luke 2:21-24

*And when eight days had passed before the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of their purification according to the Law of Moses had completed, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the Law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

The Christmas story often ends after the appearance of angels to the shepherds and their visit to the baby Jesus in the manger with the arrival of the Magi from the East bearing gifts for the child Jesus. But Luke records another event that occurred eight days after Jesus' birth and the prophecies about the baby Jesus by Simeon and Anna in the temple at Jerusalem.

The first point which demands our attention in this passage, is the obedience which our Lord rendered, as an infant, to the Jewish law. We read of his being circumcised on the eighth day. It is the earliest fact which is recorded in his history. Circumcision was established by God to be a sign of his chosen people that would separate them from other nations who worshipped pagan false gods. Every godly Jewish family would have had their sons circumcised and Joseph and Mary were no exception. Our Lord's circumcision was a public testimony to Israel, that according to the flesh he was a Jew, born of a Jewish woman, and "born under the law." (Galatians 4:4) Without it he would not have fulfilled the Mosaic Law's requirements which he came to accomplish. Without it he could not have been recognized as the son of David, and the seed of Abraham.

The second point which demands our attention in this passage is the name by which our Lord was called, by God's special command. "Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived." The word "Jesus" means simply "Savior." Very striking and instructive is the selection of this name. The Son of God came down from heaven to be not only the Savior, but the King, the Lawgiver, the Prophet, the Priest, the Judge of fallen man. Had he chosen any one of these titles, he would only have chosen that which was his own. But he passed by them all. He selects a name which speaks of mercy, grace, help, and deliverance for a lost world. It is as a deliverer and redeemer that he desires principally to be known.

Let us often ask ourselves what our own hearts know of the Son of God. Is he our Jesus, our Savior? This is the question on which our salvation turns. Let us not be content to know Christ as one who performed mighty miracles and spoke as no man has ever spoken or to know him as one who is truly God and will one day judge the world. Let us see that we know him experientially, as our deliverer from the guilt and power of sin, and our redeemer from Satan's bondage. Let us strive to be able to say, "This is my friend; I was dead, and he gave me life; I was a prisoner, and he set me free." Precious indeed is this name of Jesus to all true believers! It restores them when they sin. It comforts them when they are struggling. It consoles them in sickness. It supports them in the hour of death. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous person runs into it and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10)



The last point which demands our attention in this passage is the poor and humble condition of our Lord's mother, Mary. This is a fact which, at first sight, may not stand out clearly in the form of these verses. But a reference to the twelfth chapter of Leviticus will at once make it plain. There we see, that the offering which Mary made was specially appointed to be made by poor people, "If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons." In short, her offering was a public demonstration that she was poor. (Leviticus 12:6)

Poverty, it is manifest, was our Lord's portion upon earth from the days of his earliest infancy. He was nursed and tended as a baby by a poor woman. He passed the first thirty years of his life on earth under the roof of a man of low income. We need not doubt that he ate the food, wore the clothes, worked and labored, in the same way as all who were of humble financial circumstances of that day. Such an example of humility passes man's understanding.

This Christmas we should be encouraged that no matter what financial circumstances we find ourselves in, the Lord is with us. This ought to encourage every believer who is struggling economically in his approaches to the throne of grace in prayer. Let him remember in all his prayers that his mighty Mediator in heaven is accustomed to the life of low income, and knows by experience the heart of a person in this situation. The Lord is never impressed with a person's income or worldly success, but only his or her heart and faith in him. Christmas is not a time to remember how much money we don't have, but to remember the spiritual riches we do have in Christ.

Day 18  
Luke 2:25-35

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He came by the Spirit into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to perform for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God, and said, "Lord, you now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the presence of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."*

*Joseph and his mother were amazed at these things which were spoken of him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be opposed (a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

Christmas is a time when believers all over the world declare their faith in Jesus Christ. The first Christmas was no different. We have in these verses the history of one whose name is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament, "a just and devout man" named Simeon. We know nothing of his life before or after the time when Christ was born. We are only told that he came by the Spirit into the temple, when the child Jesus was brought there by his mother, and that he "took him up in his arms and blessed God" in words which are now well-known all over the world.

We see, in the case of Simeon, how God has a believing people even in the worst of places and in the darkest times. True faith was at a very low ebb in Israel when Christ was born. The faith of Abraham was spoiled by the doctrines of Pharisees and Sadducees. The fine gold had become deplorably dim. Yet even then we find in the midst of Jerusalem a man "just and devout," a man "in whom the Holy Spirit was working."

It is a blessed thought that God never leaves himself entirely without a witness. Small as his believing church may sometimes be, the gates of hades shall never completely prevail against it. The true church may be driven into the wilderness, and be a scattered as a little flock, but it never dies.

We see in the song of Simeon how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death. "Lord," says old Simeon, "now let your servant depart in peace." He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors and the world its charms. He desires to be released from the miseries of this pilgrim-state of existence and to be allowed to go home. He is willing to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8) He speaks as one who knows where he is going when he departs this life and cares not how soon he goes. The change with him will be a change for the better and he desires that his change may come.

How do we get such faith that takes away the fear of death? This faith comes through maturing in Christ. Through your years as a Christian you need to study the Word of God so that you can grow in your understanding of who God is and you need to trust God in ever greater ways as you face trials and troubles in this life. You will then see God work in wonderful ways as

he displays his attributes in your life in the midst of your trials and your faith will grow and deepen as he works all things to your spiritual good. (Romans 8:28)

We see, furthermore, in the song of Simeon, what clear views of Christ's work and office some Jewish believers attained, even before the Gospel was preached. We find this good old man speaking of Jesus as "the salvation which God had prepared," as "a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." Christ was indeed "a light to enlighten the Gentiles." Without him they were sunk in deep darkness and superstition. They did not know the way to eternal life. They worshiped the works of their own hands. Their wisest philosophers were utterly ignorant in spiritual things. "Professing themselves to be wise they became fools." (Romans 1:22) The Gospel of Christ was like sunrise to Greece and Rome, and the whole heathen world. The light which it let in on men's minds on the subject of spiritual truth was as great as the change from night to day.

Christ was indeed "the glory of Israel." The descent from Abraham, the covenants, the promises, the Law of Moses, the divinely ordered temple service, all these were mighty privileges. But all were as nothing compared to the mighty fact that out of Israel was born the Savior of the world. This was to be the highest honor of the Jewish nation, that the mother of Christ was a Jewish woman, and that the blood of one "born of the seed of David, according to the flesh," was to make atonement for the sin of mankind. (Romans 1:3)

Let us remember, the words of Simeon will yet receive a fuller accomplishment. The "light" which he saw by faith, as he held the child Jesus in his arms, shall yet shine so brightly that all the nations of the Gentile world shall see it. The "glory" of that Jesus whom Israel crucified, shall one day be revealed so clearly to the scattered Jews, that they shall look on him whom they pierced, and repent, and be converted. (Zechariah 12:10) The day shall come when the veil shall be taken from the heart of Israel, and all will "glory in the Lord." (Isaiah 45:25) Let us wait for that day, and watch, and pray. If Christ is the light and glory of our souls, that day cannot come too soon.

We see, lastly, in this passage, a striking account of the results which would follow when Jesus Christ and his Gospel came into the world. Every word of Simeon on this subject deserves private meditation. It forms a prophecy which is being daily fulfilled. Christ was to be "a sign opposed." He was to be a target for all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He was to be "despised and rejected of men." He and his people were to be assailed on every side and hated by all sorts of enemies. And so it was.

Christ was prophesied to be the Savior of many who, at one time, rejected, blasphemed, and reviled him, but afterwards repented and believed. And so it was. Christ was to be the occasion of "the thoughts of many hearts being revealed." His Gospel was to bring to light the real characters of many people. The hostility to God of some, the inward weariness and hunger of others, would be discovered by the preaching of the cross. It would show what men really were. And so, it was.

During this Christmas focus on Jesus and trusting him. Are you facing a problem or difficulty or stressful circumstance that is too big or too complex for the Son of God to solve? No. There is no situation that the baby held in the arms of Simeon who grew up, performed incredible miracles, died on the cross, and is now standing at the right hand of God cannot accomplish for our good! Praise Jesus Christ for what he does on our behalf which began at his birth and continues through today.

Day 19  
Luke 2:36-40

*There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was married and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayer night and day. When she came up to them, at that moment she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. When they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. The child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.*

The Christmas story is filled with witnesses to the true identity of the baby born in Bethlehem to Mary. This was important so there would be no doubt that Mary and Joseph had not fabricated the story that Jesus was the Son of God born miraculously to Mary when she was a virgin. The other witnesses were Elizabeth, Zechariah, the shepherds, Simeon, and now Anna. The Magi will be the final witnesses. All give the same testimony that this child born to Mary was the Son of God.

The history of Anna, like that of Simeon, is related only by Luke. The wisdom of God ordained that a woman as well as a man should testify to the fact that Messiah was born. Let us observe, in these verses, the character of a holy woman before the establishment of Christ's Gospel. The facts recorded about Anna are few and simple. But we shall find them full of instruction.

Anna was a woman of irreproachable character. After a married life of only seven years duration, she had spent eighty-four years as a widow. The trials, desolation, and temptation of such a condition were probably very great. But Anna by grace overcame them all. Her dedication and godliness was not in her singleness, but in her single daily focus on the Lord. She could have honored the Lord by remarrying, but chose to honor the Lord by a life of service to him.

Anna was a woman who loved God's house. "She did not depart from the temple." She regarded it as the place where God especially dwelt. Being near to God was the desire of her heart, and she felt that she was never so near as within the walls which contained the altar and the holy of holies. She could enter into David's words, "my soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." (Psalm 84:2) Although dedication to the temple is no longer possible or necessary now that Jesus has come and the Holy Spirit dwells within us as the people of God, we can imitate her desire to be near to God wherever we are.

Anna was a woman of great dependence on the Lord. She "served God with fasting and prayer night and day." Fasting (depriving oneself of food) as practiced by the Jews was an expression of their humble dependence upon God. It was normally done for a short period of time (sunrise to sunset) during the day for one day or more. Fasting does not move the hand of God. Faith in the Lord that is the basis of all prayer whether or not it is accompanied by fasting (rather than the practice of fasting itself) is what moves the hand of God in agreement with his will for the life of the believer.

Anna displayed her strong faith and dependence on the Lord in her commitment to daily prayer. She was continually communicating with God about the things that concerned the

blessing and peace of Israel. She was never weary of pleading with him on behalf of others, and, above all, for the fulfillment of his promises of Messiah for her and her people.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, that Anna was a woman who enjoyed community with other true believers. As soon as she had seen Jesus she “spoke of him” to others who looked for “redemption in Jerusalem” and thus shared the same hope as hers for the coming of the Messiah. This shows that there was an expectation among the Jews at the end of the 1st century BCE of the Messiah coming in their lifetimes. These believers fellowshiped together because of their faith in the promises of God.

Let us learn a lesson from these good people. If they, with so few helps and so many discouragements, lived such a life of faith, how much more should we live by faith with a completed Bible and the whole Gospel. Let us strive, like them, to walk by faith and look forward. The second coming of Christ is in the future. The complete “redemption” of this earth from sin, and Satan, and the curse, is yet to take place. Let us declare plainly by our lives and conduct, that for this second coming we look and long. We may be sure that the highest priority of Christianity even now, is to “wait for redemption” and to love the Lord's appearing. (Romans 8:23; 2 Timothy 4:8)

And Anna received a rich reward for all her diligence in God's service, before she left the world. She was allowed to see him who had been promised so long ago, and for whose coming she had so often prayed. Her faith was at last changed to sight and her hope to certainty. The joy of this holy woman must indeed have been “unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:8)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, what clear proof we have that the Lord Jesus was really and truly man, as well as God. We read, that when Mary and Joseph returned to their own city, Nazareth, “the child grew and became strong in spirit.”

There is, without a doubt so much that is deeply mysterious in the person of the Lord Jesus. How the same person could be at once perfect God and perfect man, is a point that necessarily surpasses our understanding. In what manner and measure, and in what proportion at the early part of his life, that divine knowledge which he doubtless possessed, was exercised, we cannot possibly explain. It is a lofty truth. We cannot attain to it.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear, and we shall do well to lay firm hold upon it. Our Lord partook of everything that belongs to man's nature, except for sin. As man, he was born an infant. As man, he grew from infancy to boyhood. As man, he yearly increased in bodily strength and mental power, during his passage from boyhood to adulthood. Of all the sinless conditions of man's body, its weakness, its growth, its regular progress to maturity, he was in the fullest sense a partaker. We must rest satisfied with knowing this. To pry beyond this is useless. To know this clearly is of much importance.

As we celebrate this Christmas, we should remember this wonderful truth. Jesus was indeed the messiah. And the messiah was to be God become a human being. As a man our Lord is able to sympathize with us as human beings in every stage of our existence, from the cradle to the grave. He knows by experience the nature and temperament of the child, the teenager, the young adult, and the adult. He has occupied our position. He knows our hearts. Let us never forget this and, as Anna did, let us draw near to our Lord in prayer at this special time of year.

## The Official Recognition of Jesus

Day 20 Matthew 2:1-12

Day 20  
Matthew 2:1-12

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "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." When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.*

*Gathering all the chief priests and scribes of the Jewish people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

*Then Herod, when he had secretly called the Magi, inquired of them earnestly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was located. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

*And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him. They opened their treasures and presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Being warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country by another way.*

No Christmas manger scene is complete without the three Magi bearing gifts for the newly born king. Who were these Magi and why would God choose them to give testimony of his Son? Most likely "Magi" was a title used for government dignitaries from the kingdom of Parthia to the east of Israel. One day an entourage of dignitaries from the Parthian empire showed up in Jerusalem asking the people of the city, "Where is the one born king of the Jews?"

These Magi were powerful religious and political officials within the Parthian empire (made up of Medes, Persians, and Babylonians). Their duties included the choice and election of the king of the realm. For a man to become king he must be approved and crowned by the Magi. God had chosen them to officially recognize his Son as the King of Israel. This was to be a testimony not only to the people of Israel, but to the whole world.

They had known of the prophecies of the Hebrew messiah-king who would be born in Israel and would ascend to the throne of David and rule over the whole world. They had heard this from Daniel the Hebrew prophet who had actually been appointed head of the Magi and other high officials in the Babylonian Empire by King Nebuchadnezzar and was later appointed to the same position in the Medo-Persian Empire under King Darius as recorded in the book of Daniel.

In fact, many of the Hebrews did not go back to Israel when they were freed from their exile, but stayed in that empire, intermarrying, and becoming part of every level of society and government. The area of that empire had strong Hebrew influence for five centuries right up until the time of Christ. It may be that some of the Magi had even embraced Judaism and the belief in the Most High God. Certainly, there were many Parthians who had.

They had not only a powerful physical influence, but a theological one. Daniel had received revelation from God, particularly in Daniel chapter 7, that the messiah would be a Hebrew king

who would reign forever. In Daniel 9 God gave Daniel the approximate time that messiah would come. This knowledge had become part of the Parthian and Israeli national knowledge and had created an expectation of a coming Hebrew king by the time of the birth of Christ as we saw in the hearts of Simeon and Anna.

Because Herod told his soldiers to kill any child two years and younger “according to the time which he had learned from the Magi,” most commentators believe that Jesus was between one and two years old when the Magi came. Although the Magi were not part of the manger scene, they definitely were part of the story of Christmas as they saw the star for the first time on the day of his birth and God led them to travel to Bethlehem to worship his Son as the king of Israel.

These verses show us, that there may be true servants of God in places where we should not expect to find them. The Lord Jesus has many “hidden ones” like these wise men. Their history on earth may be as little known as the Old Testament believers Melchizedek and Job or the New Testament believers who were visiting Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ death and heard and believed Peter’s message about Jesus in Acts 2 and went back to their own countries and shared the gospel. But their names are in the book of life, and they will be found with Christ in the day of his appearing. It is well to remember this. We must not look around the earth and say hastily, “all is spiritually barren.” The grace of God is not tied to places and families. The Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without the help of any outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth, like these wise men, and yet like them be made “wise leading to salvation.” There are some traveling to heaven at this moment, of whom the church and the world know nothing. They flourish in secret places like the lily among thorns, but Christ loves them and they love Christ.

The conduct of the magi described in this chapter is a splendid example of spiritual diligence. What trouble it must have cost them to travel from their homes to the place where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in modern times can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things mattered to them. They had set their hearts on seeing him “who was born King of the Jews;” and they never rested until they saw him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, “Where there is a will there is a way.”

It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our spiritual lives? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our faith in Christ cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Last, but not least, the conduct of the wise men is a striking example of faith. They believed in Christ when they had never seen him. They had only the Hebrew Scriptures read and studied in a foreign land and a sign of a star that had miraculously appeared in the night sky and yet they believed. But that was not all. They believed in him when the Scribes and Pharisees who were part of God’s people who had seen the prophets who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures, yet did not believe. But that again was not all. They believed in him when they saw him as a little child with Mary and worshiped him as a king. This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of deity and greatness to amaze them. They saw nothing but a child needing a mother's care like any one of us. And yet when they saw him with the eyes of faith resting in the Hebrew Scriptures



and God's miraculous appearing and movement of the star they believed that they saw the divine Savior of the world. "They fell down and worshiped him."

This is the kind of faith, let us remember, that God delights to honor. We see the proof of that at this very day. Wherever the Bible is read the conduct of these wise men is known, and told as a memorial of them. Let us walk in the steps of their faith. Let us not be ashamed of placing our faith in the Scriptures and believing in Jesus and confessing him, though all those around us remain careless and unbelieving. Have we not a thousand-fold more evidence than the wise men had, to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ? Beyond doubt we have. Let's live by our faith not only at Christmas, but throughout the whole year.