

December 2018

Dear neighbours,

“Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat.
Please put a penny in the old man’s hat.”

So runs the old nursery rhyme about Christmas. Much preparation. A time of eating. A time of generosity, then as now. And since those days much more has accumulated and the season extends.

Yet the reason for Christmas, and for the Christmas holidays, lies largely forgotten. We could do without the tinsel very easily, provided we possess the reason.

It is about Christ, the Saviour of the world. About a unique event with lasting consequences. God became flesh. So that we could see in one unique man what the invisible Spirit, who is God, is like.

Is Jesus Christ kind? Then God is kind. Is He loving? Then God is loving. In fact, the Bible says, “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Colossians 2.9

This is remarkable and indeed is a one-off. No other man, no other religious leader, has such an identity. It is this which warrants the Saviour to claim our allegiance.

His birth was different in two ways. What man usually performs in begetting, the Holy Spirit of God did. He also prevented any inborn sin in Mary permeating the Saviour’s mortal frame. It is a reverent mystery. The net result was a sinless man.

The Bible puts it beautifully as the angel unfolds to Mary what will happen in conception. “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1.35). Mary’s own description of what happened to her is equally beautiful, “he that is mighty has done to me great things; and holy is his name” (Luke 1.49).

This sinless man, the Lord Jesus Christ, replaced Adam as the head of the human race. In Adam we all reflect in some way our rebellion towards God by nature. In Christ, all who believe in Him will be made perfect, by faith in Him.

Well, the real purpose of Christmas is to remember Christ’s birth. Whether the 25th December is the day or not is of no real significance. The Queen has an official state birthday and observes her own date privately. So long as we acknowledge with all our heart this unique event concerning Christ, and those things which of necessity follow from it, we get it right.

A newborn baby is wonderful. Complete, but not, of course, mature. Even as a newborn baby Christ is the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Bodily restrictions there may be, such as immaturity, but there are no limitations as to Godhead. So that as an infant and as a toddler He was perfect. We have a glimpse of him aged 12 “about my Father’s business” (Luke 2.49) with just a touch of the issues facing the parents of such a child. But no sin. And then He is afterwards referred to as a carpenter like Joseph, the family breadwinner and Mary’s husband. Then, aged 30 or thereabouts, He entered into His public ministry still never having sinned.

Perfection was a complete necessity from first to last. Being utterly a perfect man, not just seeming to be a man, was essential. But, equally perfectly, He was God in His mortal body. Certain limitations were placed concerning the exercise of His Godhead by being in a human body. He could not, for example, be everywhere at once (as He is now) but no quality of the Godhead was compromised because of that. He always was “the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

When God the Father sentenced Adam to death for his sin, “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” all his successors, ourselves included, are also under that same death sentence. And when Adam was driven out of Eden, the way of life for his eternal soul and that of all his successors was

barred to him and to us. No man or woman descended from Adam has ever in principle been different, inheriting by nature disobedience to God; and like punishment.

However, there is forgiveness with God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3.16). The Father gave His Son to the world that every believer in Him might regain what Adam lost (and better); that their sins might be forgiven, to enjoy daily company with God again (Genesis 3.8).

Only God can forgive sins. As God, Jesus could do that. But, as a man, only Jesus could endure the punishment of sin and survive. He had no sins of His own. But, being identified with mankind, He could pay the punishment due to those who trust Him, though they are sinners. If you believe that His death was on behalf of every believer, and you believe, then upon confession of and repentance for all your own sins, pardon is free. It is a transaction you make with the Father about His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

More than that. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14.6). He is the way to the Father in heaven through His death on behalf of the believer making atonement for their sins, and in consequence making them holy. He is the truth about the Father which we may clearly see in all His character. And He is the life which brings us to the Father.

"I am the resurrection, and the life," Jesus said (John 11.25). Though we all die, in Jesus alone life is freely given. He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11) as proof He could do it. He was Himself raised from the dead and is alive for evermore. He raises up the believer into an everlasting life, where there is no sin, and never more will be, with God in heaven. Spiritual life, of a living friendship with Him, is also His gift.

The Bible teaches a bodily resurrection. Individuals who believe shall be made like unto His glorious body. "We (believers in Christ) shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality..." (1 Corinthians 15. 51-53).

Whatever else we do or don't do, the aim of Christmas is to remind us of all that was set in motion by the birth of this particular baby, the Lord Jesus Christ, "the fulness of the Godhead bodily," leading to His death on behalf of those who believe, and everlasting life beyond the grave. As Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11.25-26)

Martha answered Yes. What is your answer?

Yours affectionately,