



Foundation of Faith

Heaven on Earth

THE SAVIOR—FOR YOU
THE MIRACLE OF BETHLEHEM
WE SAW HIS GLORY
AT YEAR'S END

DECEMBER 2022

Content

HEAVEN ON EARTH

- 4 Heaven Is Opened to Me**
A girl celebrates her last Advent.
- 5 The Savior Is Knocking at Your Door**
- 6 The Miracle of Bethlehem**
- 8 The Wise Men from the East**
What we can learn from the wise
- 9 The Miracle: In Christ, God Came to Us**
- 10 The Triad In the Christmas Story**
- 12 The Savior of the World has Come**
- 13 Are You Ready for Heaven?**
- 14 Bread from Heaven**
What satisfies the soul's hunger?
- 15 The Savior—For You**

RADIO BROADCAST

- 16 We Saw His Glory**
The glory was not in the manger in a stable surrounded by angels, shepherds, and Mary and Joseph. Can you see the true glory of Christmas?

3 Editorial

YOUTH PAGES

- 18 Freed from the Power of Movies and Games**

- 20 At Year's End**

CHILDREN'S CORNER

- 21 A Bold Testimony**

SENIORS' PAGE

- 22 Thus Far**

Do you look back at your life, at all your shortcomings, and the great goodness, patience and grace of God?

- 24 Thoughts as the Clock Strikes Twelve**

- 26 A Fateful New Year's Eve**

POEM

- 28 Year End**

FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Editor

Hans-Dietrich Nimz

Editorial Team

Niko Ernst

Harry Semenjuk

Ron Taron

Hermann Vogt

•

The FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a journal of vital Christianity, published in the interest of the Church of God, that takes a clear and decisive stand for full salvation in Christ, the unity of all true believers, and the truths of the Bible.

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit all materials and information submitted for publication. Research sources are listed for information only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

•

Questions and suggestions can be sent to:
contact@foundationoffaith.cc

Please address all other correspondence
and subscription requests to:

Christian Unity Press

5195 Exchange Drive

Flint, MI 48507

Tel.: (810) 732-1831

or email us at

cupress@thechurchofgod.cc

www.christianunitypress.com

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA Volume 20 Issue 12

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a trademark owned by Christian Unity Press in the United States and foreign countries.

Printed in USA.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is published free of charge. All expenses are covered by freewill donations.

Editorial

Dear Reader,

The birth of Jesus was a joyous event. Enshrined in the Word of God is the wonderful message for all mankind from our Heavenly Father. God spoke through an angel who went to the shepherds in Bethlehem to proclaim, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2: 10).

Jesus’ birth sparked a new era. God gave the law through Moses, but it was through Jesus Christ that we received grace and truth. On one hand, the Law of Moses served to prepare people for the Messiah. However, God also sacrificed His dear Son Jesus Christ for us, giving us His love, faith, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and heavenly light and life.

Beginning with the birth of Jesus, the gospel age declared the message, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.” This means everyone on earth of all nations and ages can be certain that Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior, came for you and for me.

Yes, Christ came to reconcile us, descending to this sin-stricken world despite being the Father’s only begotten Son. We can still share this joyful news with others just as it has been done.

Then, as now, darkness covered the earth and deep darkness the people. Yet, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy” (Isaiah 9: 2–3).

In these dark and desperate times, the Lord lets His light shine. Christ’s birth was the Christmas miracle! He preached, comforted, healed, and helped—but above all, the divine Son of God came to free us from the power of Satan and the slavery of sin.

Let us take this occasion to remember that, had Jesus not come to earth, we would all be lost for eternity.

We wish all our readers a blessed Christmas!

H. D. Nimz

Heaven is Opened to Me

Little Maria had been in great pain. Last night, she had been in surgery at the hospital. Now she felt no pain, but the doctor had said, “She won’t get completely well.”

Next to Maria’s bed were two others. One was empty. In the other one lay a child with many wounds. She had been sorely mistreated. She watched with wide eyes as Maria’s mother kissed Maria.

A lady entered the room, came first to the wounded girl’s bedside, and tenderly ran her hands over the child’s cheeks. Astonished, the child looked up and asked, “Are you an angel?” The lady gave her a piece of cake.

Then she came to Maria and her mother. Sympathetically, she squeezed the mother’s hand, and then laid down a large bunch of grapes for Maria. “Mama, look!” said Maria, holding up the grapes in her hot hands.

After a while, the bells outside began to ring. Astonished, Maria asked, “Why are the bells still ringing so late?”

“They are ringing in the holiday because tomorrow is Advent,” her mother answered.

“What is Advent, Mama?”

“Advent means arrival. The

word reminds us that Jesus arrived once and that He will come again.”

“Is He coming to me, too?”

“He comes to everyone who loves Him.”

“How can I show Him that I love Him? Surely I can do nothing for Him!”

The mother replied, “He doesn’t ask for much. He once said, ‘Inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’”

Slowly, the night descended, and it was time for Mama to leave little Maria. “Try to eat some more beautiful grapes, darling. They will refresh you, and tomorrow you will say you feel better again.” The child looked lovingly at the grapes. Then she said, “I’ll save them for the night. As soon as I am thirsty, I will eat them. They smell so nice, Mama; smell them.”

Maria tried to lift the grapes once more. Her mother placed them very carefully on the bedside table. Then she left the room.

Maria slept little that night. She was probably thirsty. But she was almost too weak to reach for the grapes.

Finally, the morning came. A nurse brought an Advent wreath into the room. Maria sat up happily, and when she saw her grapes,

her thin fingers plucked off a grape. How sweet it tasted and how it cooled her tongue!

Just as she was about to reach for a second grape, she saw two big eyes looking eagerly at the fruit. “Are you thirsty?” Maria asked her neighbor. The girl nodded and kept looking at the grape.

Maria would have loved to eat it herself. But then she called out, “Jesus is coming soon!”

“*If He comes soon, then I won’t need the grapes either,*” she thought.

Quickly, she took the fruit and handed it to her neighbor. At the same moment, Mama entered the room. She saw the other child feasting on the fruit. “Are these your grapes?” she asked hesitantly.

“Mama,” Maria answered very softly, “Let it be; I think I have just celebrated Advent.”

A group of singers gathered outside in the hallway. Their song rang out, “At holy Advent I knock and stand at the door.” And at the end they sang, “All heaven is opened to him.”

“Yes, yes, oh how beautiful!” exclaimed Maria. “Heaven is opened to me!” These were her last words, for an angel carried her young soul home to the arms of the Savior she so loved. ■



The Savior is Knocking at Your Door

Three young girls were standing in front of a store window looking at pictures on display during the pre-Christmas season.

One of the children said, “That’s the most beautiful thing, where the Savior stands at the door and knocks.”

“Why does He knock,” asked the second child, “when He can enter anywhere He wants to?”

“No,” replied the other child. “You know, my dad told me that’s the door of the heart, and if you don’t want to let the Savior in, He can’t get in. He often has to knock for a long time.”

“O, we have the same picture at home, but it’s much nicer and bigger,” said the third girl. “My grandmother gave it as a gift to my parents for Christmas. It hangs in our spacious living room. But, two weeks ago we celebrated Dad’s birthday. It was a great party. The men and women came all dressed up and danced the night away! For a while, they placed the image of

the Savior in the washroom. If my grandmother knew that, I think she would be in tears. It’s just as well she doesn’t live here.”

This is what some people do with the Savior. Some will hang His nicely framed painting as a wall décor in the living room so their visitors will see that they aren’t completely godless. As a painting on the wall, the Savior is also quite patient. Yet He doesn’t want to serve primarily as a wall display or décor. He wants to enter our hearts as the living Lord, so He knocks on our conscience and in our inner being.

Perhaps one of these pictures of Christ displayed on a wall will be decorated with a few green branches during Christmas as decoration. In our hearts, we too may sense something from the artwork of Jesus knocking at our hearts’ door. We may even be overcome by a little Christmas spirit. However, Jesus doesn’t want our mood or emotions, which fluctuate, but our will, which obeys Him. ■

When the Savior only hangs on the wall and doesn’t live or sit enthroned in the heart, every-day life washes away all the pious impressions, and everything remains the same. If we engage in an activity that results in a sullied conscience, where the Savior is not welcome, then we’ve simply “put Him in the dark room” so we won’t be disturbed by the sight of Him.

What will the Savior experience with you now during this Christmas season? Outward tributes and some emotion without you opening your heart to Him and surrendering yourself to Him in faith? How many hearts will He knock on in vain? After knocking in vain, will He sadly turn away again? If so, then a pitiful time without Jesus lies ahead of you.

Christmas time is decision time. Today I want you to realize that it is the most important thing in the world for you to hear Jesus’ voice and open your heart to Him. ■



The Miracle of Bethlehem

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Doesn't it sound lovely, the word of the inspired apostle? Christ had become the reality of what the prophets had seen from afar.

The miracle of Bethlehem will remain something mysterious for all time. How many have tried to fathom it with their faculties of reason and could not—that the human form of Jesus through Whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelt, He, the Creator of heaven and earth, descended to earth to dwell among us in human form. That Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that His human nature remained pure, we hear from the message that the angel brought to the Virgin Mary: “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of

the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Yes, the Lord of creation came into this world without human intervention. His conception was supernatural, yet He had to endure a natural birth like that of a human being. He was to become like His human brothers in all things.

Oh, how the great, wonderful God is brought so close to us when we contemplate this miracle of Bethlehem in holy awe! It seems to me that we should be overcome by the same feelings as those shepherds who, upon hearing the angel's message, said, “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us

now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15).

How very different was the day of Bethlehem, when the glorious message of joy of God’s good pleasure was proclaimed, from the day when the angel had to stand before the gate of the Garden of Eden with a bared sword to deny humans access to the tree of life. There, humans were deprived of the divine bread. Here in Bethlehem (Bethlehem means “house of bread”), the divine bread was restored to them in the form of the divine Person. Therefore, we can understand very well the apostle’s shout of triumph when he says, “The Word became flesh . . . we beheld His glory.”

So what does this miracle of Bethlehem mean for us? We did not have the privilege of seeing what the apostles saw. But through salvation we have experienced that He is full of grace and truth. Amazingly, we too can say, “We beheld His glory”! With his face veiled, Moses the faithful man of God stood on the mountain when the glory of the Lord passed him by, but we may behold with unveiled face what the ancient men of God so desired to see. Truly, in Jesus Christ is reflected the glory of the invisible God. In Him are revealed all the attributes of the Godhead. Not only do we see in this miracle of Bethlehem the perfect ideal man, Jesus Christ, but we exclaim in holy awe with the disciple, “My Lord and my God!” We also joyfully join in faith in the bold confession of the apostle Peter, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:69).

Let us now turn our attention to two glorious words of the apostle John: “grace and truth.” We are told much in the Bible of what a godly life should be, but here we are given the means to realize such a life. The Lord Jesus did not come to tell us about grace; instead, He brought it to us. He is not full of the messages of grace and truth; rather, He is full of grace and truth.

Others taught about the way that leads to God, but He Himself *is* the way. People can become partakers of grace and live in it. He is the Source from which all grace flows, “and of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Grace and truth are closely connected. We can rightly say that truth con-

firms the grace offered. It confirms the grace of redemption, which consists of actual forgiveness of all sins and of a real transformation of the heart. Through this grace, one can live a complete life of victory over sin. We are not dealing here with blessings that are pleasing to the ear and stir the heart, but with blessings that bring us the real favor of God. The truth the Lord Jesus brings to us does not come from the judgment seat but from the mercy seat. It does not come to condemn and punish, but to help, comfort, and save.

Full of grace.—Jesus came into a world full of curses, a world that has turned away from God and does not desire Him, but despises Him. Must we not then cry out, “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’” (Exodus 34:6)? What grace there is in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus! The angels in Bethlehem’s fields expressed this grace in a special way through their glorious praise. What gracious thoughts God must have towards us human beings that He appears in our human nature! Let us contemplate in holy awe the miracle of Bethlehem. Remember, He Who lay there in the manger and in Mary’s bosom is called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

We continue to see this grace revealed in abundance in the Lord’s life on earth. An apostle tells us, “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (see Hebrews 5:8). A wonderful human brotherhood united Him to us human beings. Was He not our faithful high priest who, even encompassed in weakness, bore all our sorrows and hardships? Is there any suffering through which our Lord did not pass? What a wonderful hope comes to us through His life! Shall He, who has borne my curse, curse me? Shall He not have mercy on me, Who Himself has borne my sorrows and hardships? Let us consider His dealings with humanity. O, what mercy flowed from Him! Indeed, those who had healthy spiritual vision saw His glory. Let us immerse ourselves in the miracle of Bethlehem and worship Him humbly this Christmas.

A. Borbe

The Wise Men from the East

In Matthew 2, we are told how the Wise Men from the East came to see the newborn child, the Savior.

Why were these men called wise men? In the eyes of the world, perhaps because they were learned astronomers. But in the eyes of Christians, the true children of God, they were wise men because they sought Christ.

The best thing any person can do in their life is to seek Christ with all their heart. These men were wise because they were determined to find Christ, and they did not let anything stop them from fulfilling their purpose.

Once a person is determined to find Christ, they will succeed, for Christ stands at the door of the heart and knocks. He even asks to be let in.

When the prodigal son came to understand his need for redemption, he said, "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18). He went, and the fa-

ther met him with outstretched arms. What we need is a firm resolve in our hearts to find the Lord Jesus, and He will be found.

These wise men came to worship Christ. Whoever reverently approaches the Lord to offer worship will be blessed above asking and understanding.

These learned men from the East were also wise because they set out immediately after the star appeared to them. They did not hesitate and did not wait for a more convenient time.

Many people repeatedly hear the gospel, yet they refuse to come to Christ. Many wait until they are in need; then they want someone to pray for them. But

the Word of God says that those who seek the Lord early in their lives will find Him.

However, when someone is determined to seek and follow the Lord, Satan is also immediately ready to begin his work. Here among the wise men, we find King Herod immediately ready to collaborate with the devil, saying to them, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also" (Matthew 2:8). However, Herod wanted to kill the child. We know he went so far as to have all children under the age of two killed to be sure he had killed the baby

Jesus as well, but it did him no good.

We also see that as soon as the wise men set out from Herod's to look for the Child, the star they had seen in the East went before them again. When they saw the star, they were delighted.

God always has a way to lead and guide His own. He led the

Israelites with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. He has promised us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). He will not depart from us if we hold fast to Him. God has always kept His promises, and He will continue to keep them.

We have seen that the wise men were delighted when they saw the star again. When we really see the Lord Jesus Christ, our soul is blessed with an inexpressible joy.

The star led the wise men to Christ. If you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, my dear Reader, He will lead you to Christ. At the feet of Jesus, you will find rest for your soul and peace with God.

*"I will
never leave you
nor forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5*

As soon as the wise men found the baby Jesus, they fell down before Him and worshipped Him. How very different it is today in some modern churches! People no longer want to bend their knees before the Lord, often not even bowing their heads before Him. But these wise men actually fell down before the Child Jesus. They humbled themselves before Him and offered Him worship with all their hearts. God cannot speak to a person until the proud heart has humbled itself before Him.

After having worshiped the child and given Him their treasures, the wise men went back to their country by another route. They took a new path.

After meeting Jesus, one walks a new path. They have become new. The old life of sin is abandoned. They walk in the way of righteousness and holiness. Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he *is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). ■

The Miracle: In Christ, God Came to Us

Two groups of people do not believe this. One is the sure sinners who are so caught up in the business of the world and in the worldly and visible things that they simply do not notice the coming of the living God. While they do not deny Him, He is so on the periphery of their thinking that their life is indeed a life without God. Therefore, they do not see or know they are lost people in a lost world. They do not know they are under the curse.

Then there are others who do not realize their Savior is coming to them. These are the ones who want to be saved by their own righteousness. They work themselves to pieces trying to be "good," struggling with desperation against their weaknesses. They try to tear down the fence between God and themselves in their own strength, by trying to be righteous before God with all their might.

O please stop! Why would Jesus have had to travel from eternity via Bethlehem, Golgotha, and Easter if it was up to our efforts? Jesus is com-

ing! He comes to us who could not come to Him, carrying the gift of full salvation in His hands. He also comes to those who do not want Him, for whom this salvation is only a fairy tale, and yet, no one can sweep the coming of God off the table with a wave of their hand.

The Bible holds a different view: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) than in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 10).

It is up to us what we do with this holy word, because:

Everyone may become joyful,
Everyone may become free.
Everyone may become assured of salvation,
But everyone can also be condemned.

Let us make the right choice, because Christmas time is decision time! ■

The Triad In the Christmas Story

“Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2: 10-11).

This is the most glorious news we can receive. Here in Luke 2, we are told that the Lord’s glory shone around the shepherds in Bethlehem’s field. This was a light from eternity. It gives us a glimpse of the greatness of heavenly glory. Stars paled and night became day when the glory of the Lord shone around them. This heavenly glory shines on, from year to year, from century to century, until the Lord comes again.

It is reported of the shepherds that they were very afraid. Whenever the luminosity of God shines into the darkness of this world, terror is the first reaction. Consider Zacharias in the temple or when the angel appeared to Mary. John also experienced this holy fright when on the island of Patmos he saw the exalted Lord with “His eyes like a flame of fire.” John fell down like a dead man before this incomprehensible glory. May we also comprehend this glory of God so it illuminates us and we are in awe before the Eternal, Who was there, Who is there, and Who is coming.

The words of the angel to the shepherds comprise the first Christmas sermon. It is short, but

every word is important, and has much to tell us.

The First Part of the Triad: Do Not Be Afraid— Great Joy—All People

“Do not be afraid.”—Where the glory of the Lord shines, there is no more room for fear; there is only room for joy. “Do not be afraid.” What a message! The angel was sent to proclaim the good news, the everlasting gospel. Let us never stop paying attention to this message in a world of turmoil and fear. Christ came, and He will come again to take His own to Himself.

“Great joy”—This is the essence of the new covenant. All the sadness of this world can be outshone by this joy. All sin and guilt is erased through the great joy that Jesus has brought. Yes, Christ the Savior is here and has given us this joy. The time of salvation and grace has dawned. God’s face is turned toward us. The true light is shining now, and that is great joy.

This joy is to “all people.” The Christmas sermon is for all people. No one is excluded from it. The world will be helped if it accepts this message. No one must be lost.

The Second Part of the Triad: He is Born—Born to You— Born This Day

“Christ is born.”—The life of every human being begins with birth. Here, the Son of God, the eternal Word, became human. He knows how we feel in this poor earthly life. Therefore, He became a compassionate High Priest for us Who bears our guilt, hears us, forgives our sin, and makes us members of His church.

Christ is born—born to you—born this day. He was already there before the foundation of the world; indeed, He is eternal, but now He has entered our time. In His high priestly prayer, He said, “with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” “For there is born to you this day . . . a Savior” rings in the heart of the seeker who desires to find divine peace in their longing and restlessness.

The Third Segment of the Triad: A Savior—Christ—the Lord

The word “Savior” is often used in the New Testament. It means no one else can save us but He, the Savior. With this word, the angel

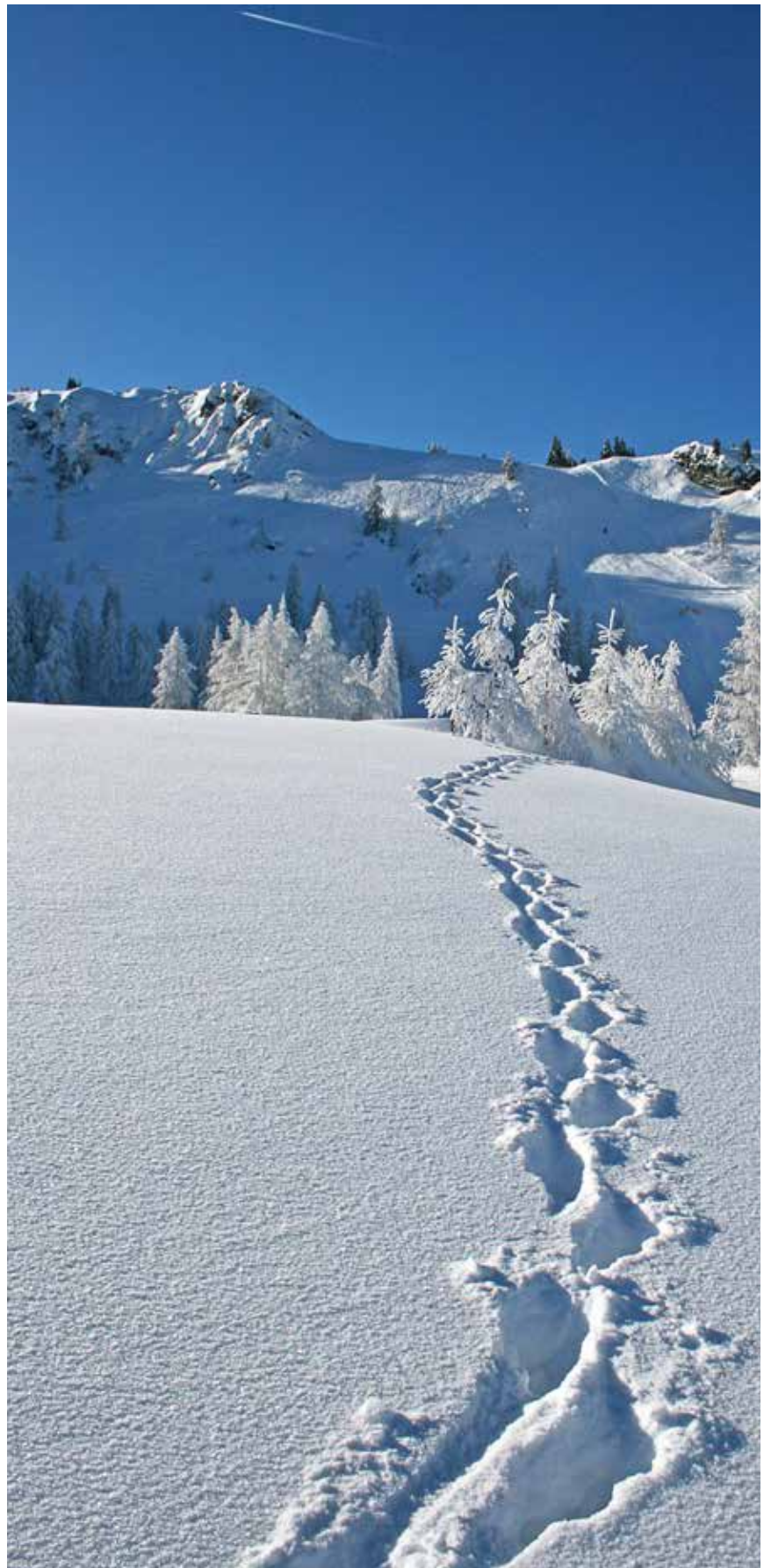
proclaimed the great work of Jesus Christ.

“Christ”—His title is Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. He is a priest-king. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. In Christ, these offices are united. He is our High Priest and our King, indeed, the King of all kings. Only through faith in Him can we become children of God. Only He can call us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He can save us from the power of sin. Christ must live in us, otherwise the birth of Christ and also His suffering and death have no value for us personally.

The angel said, “Lord.” This newborn child is called “Lord.” He is the Lord of all mankind. He wants to be our Lord, but He does not want to enslave us as Satan does.

What a Christmas present! This is cause for great joy. Yes, we may have this joy, “for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Otto Sommerfeld



The Savior of the World has Come

He has come! The One for Whom the fathers and the nations yearned, the One of Whom the prophets spoke, the Savior of the world has come. The message of the angels resounded over the fields and mountains, and from sea to sea: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2: 10–11). Rejoice, all ye nations! Everyone rejoice, for the Savior is born for you! The star of Bethlehem that brings light into darkness is shining. He has come to break the chains, to destroy the works of the devil, and to bring liberty to souls in bondage.

Help had to come from above, from God Himself. Hundreds of years before the Savior came, Isaiah foresaw His coming and exclaimed, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9: 6).

He Is Called Wonderful

Indeed, He is wonderful! He came to deliver His people from their sins (Matthew 1: 21). That is wonderful! His life was wonderful. Wonderful are all His works. Who can fathom them? He Who was in the beginning is wonderful. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1), and this Word became flesh. Incarnation! Wonder of wonders; who can declare them? He came to save us from our sins. His wonderful love embraced the whole world as He gave His life as a sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. The power of His blood is wonderful. It can cleanse the vilest sinner. This wonderful Savior has come to take away the sins of the world and to bring us salvation, peace, joy, and life eternal.

He Is Called Mighty God

All power on earth and in heaven has been given to Him. He has power to save and power to condemn (James 4: 12). He has power to heal the sick and to drive out evil spirits. He has power to loosen the chains of bondage and to raise the dead. He has power over nature and can calm the storms of the sea. In the end, all of His enemies must yield to Him. Only He can forgive sin and free us from Satan’s power. He declares in triumph, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28: 18). “O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15: 55).

He is the Victor, mighty in battle. He is triumphant over the foe. Darkness must flee before His light. Superstition and idol temples must give way. He will reign until “His enemies are made His footstool” (Hebrews 10: 13).

He Is Called Everlasting Father

What a concept! What a mystery! His kingdom will last forever. He has no beginning and no end. Before the “morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38: 7), before the mountains existed and the world was made, He is God from everlasting to everlasting. Not only is He eternal, but He is also a Father, the Father of lights, Giver of all good gifts (James 1: 17). He is also the Father of the widows and orphans. In love, He leads and cares. Great is His faithfulness. Indeed, His name is Everlasting Father.

He Is Called Prince of Peace

Like sweet music from the realms above, we hear Him called Prince of Peace. Into this world of turmoil, sin, addictions, war, uprisings, and despair came the Prince of Peace. He came to make peace through the precious

blood on the cross. Through His sacrificial death, the enmity between God and us has been atoned. He came to give us peace and to destroy strife. He came to rid us of our sin, so we can experience peace. He came to bring peace to the restless heart, peace within families, peace for young and old, for the poor and the wealthy, for all. Countless have experienced this peace. There are many who have this peace today. Despite the storms and challenges of our time, despite wars and rumors of war, despite Satan's wrath and the turbulence of the nations, despite strife and calamity, He still remains the Prince of Peace. He says, "My peace I

give to you" (John 14:27). He is triumphant. He is the eternal Prince of Peace.

The Savior of the world has come. You are invited to come and behold Him, to ponder the mystery of the incarnation. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He lay in a manger, poor and helpless. Wonder of all wonders! Only the great love of the Heavenly Father could provide such an indescribable gift for you and me. Why? Because He loves us. In contemplation of such a great gift and such love, who can harden their heart and not make room for the Savior of the world! ■

Are You Ready for Heaven?

I rang the doorbell of an elderly couple's home. The curtain at the side window beside the front door was pushed to the side a little. The woman's inquiring gaze discovered me waiting there on the small flight of steps in front of the door, and I noticed she flinched.

The curtain unintentionally got caught a little bit and allowed me a view into the room. Then I saw why the woman was alarmed. The room was not particularly tidy. Hurriedly and a bit erratically, she tried to put everything in order before she opened the door to me. At her call, "The pastor!" the man quickly rose from a chair and put on his shoes as fast as he could.

I could see all this through the window. Then the door was opened to me.

"Ah, Pastor. Come in! How nice to see you again!" Immediately I was led into a tidy room.

A bit playfully, I said, "Well, you've tidied up in no time!" Clearly, they felt a bit sheepish, having been caught with their home in some disarray, but we all found it amusing.

This simple story is paralleled in God's Word: "Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5: 9), reminding us that the Lord can come at any moment. For the world as a whole, this word points to the Last Day; for you personally, it points to your last breath. Since you must appear before Him, He too will be standing right before you. This visit can occur quite unexpectedly, at a moment when you may not have

expected it at all and are in the middle of the biggest mess, literally and figuratively.

A good friend became seriously ill. After he recovered, he said, "God called on me!"

Are you ready when He calls on you for His final visit? "Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" Is there anything that needs to be cleaned up? Are there still hidden idols in your life, like Rachel's, that need to be removed from your life? Is there still something that needs to be made right? Is everything all right between you and God, between you and other people, your spouse, your child, your neighbor? Can God enter like this? Behold, He is at the door. At any moment, He can ring the bell.

One evening when I preached away from home, my host took me to the guest room. When he had left me, I looked around curiously; this is where I was to spend the night. I was shocked by a large wall slogan hanging right next to the bed: "Can you die as you are living now?"

I had thought of all sorts of things at that moment except for that. So the sign's sobering question hit me extra deeply. I thought about it quietly for a while and then answered the Lord.

Now I am passing this question on to you. Can you die as you are now? The bell is about to ring, and He will be standing on the threshold of your house of life.

C. Gilhuis

The Bread From Heaven

“I am the bread which came down from heaven” (John 6: 41b).

Christmas, with the beautiful lights, the presents, and sweet fellowship with loved ones, and our brothers and sisters in Christ, is one of the most wonderful, enjoyable celebrations. Christmas is not just a celebration for children, although they get so excited waiting for the day to arrive. If as adults we become like our children, a deep Christmas joy will fill our hearts.

Christmas is a celebration of giving. Jesus came from heaven to give us the greatest gift ever given to mankind. Jesus calls Himself, “The bread that came from heaven.”

We could not make a hungry person happier than giving him something to eat. The world is spiritually hungry. Souls hunger for the “bread from heaven.” Offering a hungry soul food for the body does not fill their spiritual need. The soul is not for the worldly realm. The soul originates from the divine, heavenly, and eternal realm, and from that realm is where it needs to be fed.

Jesus expressed this sentiment so well when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4: 4). Life definitely confirms these words.

Many have enjoyed material riches as well as knowledge and education. Among them were kings and wise men, but just like today, they had to freely admit that their souls could only be satisfied in God. Besides our daily bread, we need the “bread from heaven” for our

souls. If Jesus had not come, we would not have this heavenly bread.

The Old-Testament commandments could not save us from our sins. Our conscience could not be cleansed. Souls remained hungry for true peace with God.

Had He not brought us heaven,
Our Redeemer, Who saved us,
All the world would be lost.

Now we are satisfied because with Jesus’ coming, we received all heaven could give us. We can grasp this in faith, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.”

This gift from heaven is not just for us. It is for everyone. All hungry souls are invited to this special feast, even though many do not recognize it. There are still many lounging among the hedges, fences, and streets of sin, at the wells of worldly lusts, and they are dying of spiritual hunger.

Dear Child of God, would you be willing to invite these hungry souls to the prepared feast so they can be satisfied? It is God’s will that His house would be filled.

Although “Jerusalem” saw no need for this “heavenly bread,” there were shepherds, wise men, and lowly people willing to thankfully embrace this gift. Similarly, many souls today also hunger for the “bread which came down from heaven.”

H. W.

The Savior—for You

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2: 10–11).

God loves you so much, He sent you His Son. God loves you so much—yes, you—that He wants to live with you. God didn’t come only for a short visit, like one who bends graciously to a beggar and gives him a gift, but then goes on. No, He came in frail, human flesh and blood, the Son of the living God, the eternal Word, the Lord of glory.

God was not obliged to give us such an extravagant gift. He did this out of unfathomable, wondrous love.

Now the message of this love echoes through the millennia for you and me: “For there is born to you this day . . . a Savior”!

But this is about a frail little Child Who was born into the greatest poverty. Is that to be a reason for joy? Yes, because through this Child came salvation, and therefore redemption. God’s love allows us to experience true joy. God allowed His Son to become human so through Him, help would come to all humanity.

Three powerful words are mentioned about this Child: Savior-Christ-Lord.

In Him we have been given the “Savior,” Whose coming the nations have awaited. “When will He come Who will make everything whole again?” This secret longing has often sounded through the ages, for only He could bridge the gulf between God and man that sin had torn down. Only He could prepare the way to God. Only He could take the curse of sin upon Himself and accomplish true salvation.

With the name of “Christ,” He came as the One sent and commissioned by God. Because we could

never have helped ourselves, God sent His own Son, to Whom He gave authority to carry out His divine plan of salvation.

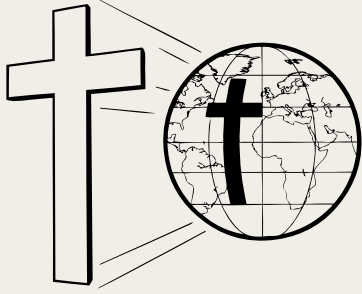
He is the “Lord” to Whom all lords will bow, the Lord Who has conquered Satan and broken through the clutches of sin. He is sent to bring salvation and freedom to the slaves of sin. To Him alone is given “all authority . . . in heaven and on earth” (see Matthew 28:18).

If we only see the Baby born into poverty, and only pay attention to His vulnerability, we won’t be able to understand this, but if we faithfully trust in God’s Word, our view will be widened. We won’t merely see the Child in the manger, but also the Man on the cross, and will hear His triumphant words, “It is finished!” With joy and thanksgiving, we’ll proclaim, “Christ the Savior is here!”

From this reality, the bright light of Christmas now enters our daily lives. This truth applies to us, allowing us to hear and believe God’s message to us, and giving us salvation, freedom, strength, and blessing. Through His call we will also be delivered from our fear: “Do not be afraid.” We will hear His comfort in our sadness: “I bring you good tidings of great joy.” We will experience His help and forgiveness for our sins: “For there is born to you this day a Savior.”

Through Christ our Savior, we will be rescued from slavery and will soar in victory, because He is “Christ the Lord”!

Klaus Haag



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

We Saw His Glory

| *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14).*

This is how the apostle introduces us to the amazing Christmas joy he and his fellow apostles experienced. He shows us that this joy needs to be seen and acknowledged. “We beheld”—their eyes needed to be opened to behold this. What we want to see and actually see must align with reality.

John points us to what was really there. He doesn't write about Mary or Joseph, the angels or the shepherds, the manger or the stable. He just tells us what really happened: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Someone explained, “Just as you can use a magnifying glass to direct the rays of the sun to a precise point, so John points us to the important truth that Jesus became man. He became flesh (human), and dwelt among us.”

Paul states that He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of man” (Philippians 2:7). With this, the great, godly mystery was fulfilled. God really could not come closer to us. He Whom all heavens and skies could not contain, revealed Himself to us in human form. To

this, a poet says, “When I attempt to grasp this miracle, my spirit stands still in awe, and is lifted in worship as I behold God's infinite love.”

From the manger to the cross, Jesus shared in our lives and our sorrows. He became human so we could become His brothers and sisters. He was the light of the world that shone into our loneliness, our darkness, and our sin-filled lives. He came to solve the problem of sin, to offer us forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation.

This is the glory John and the disciples saw in Jesus: “a glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Christmas reminds us of this glory. John placed Jesus alone as the unique glory at the center of the heavenly, holy night. Therefore, He must be at the center of our Christmas celebration. Whoever does not see Jesus at Christmas does not see His glory.

The shepherds in Bethlehem's fields understood this. When the angels were gone again, they said, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). Likewise, the wise men from the East came and “saw the young Child with Mary His



mother, and fell down and worshiped Him” (Matthew 2:11). Simeon was also given the opportunity to see the Child. He took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32).

They all saw and recognized in this helpless Child the Savior of the world and His glory. They were given a bright vision of faith, which can also be given to each of us. A poet testifies to this with the words:

Come, holy Christmas night, with your eternal light;
Revive our tired age with glory bright.
Let star and manger shine again for all to see,
And let us understand their mystery.
Where there are broken hearts travailing in the night,
Let faith and love be kindled through Your light.
Let those who cry for peace in this, our troubled time,
Receive Your peace and let Your glory shine!

This glory can be bypassed, which often happens all over the world and may even happen in the church.

A Sunday school had prepared the Christmas program. A manger had been set up with a wonderful light shining from it. During the celebration, a little boy crept up to the manger, looked inside, and shouted loudly into the church, “Mommy, there’s no Jesus in it!” This was a shattering message. Some were prompted to serious reflection. One could not simply ignore the child’s exclamation.

Of the many cultural norms and traditions associated with the concept of “Christmas,” it really needs to be stated, “There’s no Jesus in it!” Unfortunately, many Christmas celebrations in companies, schools, families, or even churches pass without a prayer or any spiritual thoughts.

May we all celebrate Christmas again but hopefully with the resolution that Jesus must be in it. Where He is missing, His glory will not be seen. May the Lord allow us to experience such a noticeable blessing this Christmas that we can say, “We beheld His glory!” ■

Freed From The Power of Movies and Games

I am very blessed to have grown up in a Christian home, learning about God's Word and being able to go to worship services every Sunday with both of my parents. When the pandemic hit, it was hard on me, as I had a tough time verbalizing my feelings about what was going on around me. I was holding in a lot of pain, which resulted in me not always being the kindest to those around me. I would spend time online trying to get away from all the things happening in the world. I came across a video with a song that I enjoyed. It was from an anime (Japanese animated) video that seemed innocent, but I did not realize how much of an impact it would have on my life. Later, when my sister found the movie online, we decided to watch it together, as we were curious about its content. This anime movie didn't seem dark or sinful, so it seemed harmless to us. From that point on, I continued to watch anime movies, but they became increasingly darker. They often had sexual content and swearing, and slowly I became desensitized to those things. This habit kept on getting worse until it eventually got to the point where I could not go a day without watching hours of anime. It numbed the pain of everything else going on in the world around me.

When my parents became concerned about the shows I was watching, they banned me from watching a certain series. However, my sister and I kept on watching when our father was out of the house. I struggle with guilt over the fact that had I introduced my sister to this realm. This harmful habit went on for almost three years, from the age of thirteen until the summer before my sixteenth birthday. I was constantly so distracted that I began to fall behind on my school

work and almost failed two years of school. During that time, I also took up gaming, which took up even more of my time and put me even further behind. Shortly before Christmas 2021, I started hearing a voice within that told me to stop watching anime. However, it was difficult as I would imagine myself living in the place of the characters, which gave me an emotional high, and therefore an emotional outlet. Even when my parents switched off the devices, I would continue to relive those scenes, which became very distracting for me. Eventually, I knew I had to regain focus in my life and listen to my conscience warning me to stop watching. Since then, I have not watched a single movie or episode.

In April 2022, I learned that a baptism was being planned at our church in June. I had asked my pastor the year before if I could be baptized, but because of the pandemic, it had not been possible. I felt like now was a good time to be baptized but realized I still had a lot to learn, since I struggled to stay victorious, and I felt unsure within. Although I had given up anime, I was filling that void by playing a game along similar lines. When my parents found out and confiscated my phone with the gaming app on it, I figured out a way around the parental controls, which allowed me to play at any time for as long as I wished. I was not finishing my school work, and I only had a short amount of time to complete it before the end of the school year. I was feeling very discouraged, thinking I would fail tenth grade and would have to redo it. At that time, I sensed a voice saying I had to give up gaming because it was taking over my life, including my relationship with Jesus. Late one night, after struggling in my soul, God



showed me what He wanted from me. I realized I had been unfaithful to Him and unkind to those around me. I confessed my sins and asked Him to forgive me. He graciously forgave me. I now had peace to make the decision to be baptized. The next morning when I woke up, I went straight to my phone and deleted the game.

The week before the baptism, Pastor Ryan brought a sermon explaining that even after we are baptized, we will still experience temptation. He also explained how baptism doesn't wash away our sins but instead symbolizes what Jesus has already done in us when He washed our sins away. After I had entirely deleted the gaming app off my phone, I was able to focus on my school work and completed most of my courses over the summer. When the baptism day came, I went with confidence, but when I told my testimony I started crying because I realized just how merciful God had been to me even though I had disobeyed. I thank God for rescuing me and I want to serve Him faithfully.

I would also like to share another experience that happened shortly after. In the middle of June, our family went on vacation for a week. Since I still had to catch up on my school work, I took it along to complete. However, with all the activities, I didn't get much of it done. On the drive back, which took several hours, I

tried to work on my math, but because of motion sickness, I couldn't do it. I sensed the Holy Spirit telling me to go ahead and work on my math, but I resisted at first, feeling sure I would get sick. He reaffirmed that I would be okay, so I tried. After about 45 minutes of doing math, I truly felt fine. When I remembered I had put sea bands on my wrists to help prevent motion sickness, I felt like God was saying, "Take off the sea bands . . . trust Me." I remember saying in my head, "If I take these off, I will definitely get sick." But the reply was, "You're not going to get sick." So as long as I was doing my math I felt fine, but if I got distracted and stopped, I began to feel sick. For the two-and-a-half-hour drive, I didn't get sick and was able to complete quite a bit of math. I thank God for helping me and keeping me healthy!

These experiences have made me realize that the smallest things can drag you down into a deep hole. Even if something seems innocent, our human nature can easily cause us to fall into sin. I realize that no matter how hard I try to be a "good" person, I will always lose the battle if I don't ask Christ to fight for me. I'm thankful He wants me to have victory and that He has already won it for me!

Annalise Engelbrecht, Chilliwack (CA)

At Year's End

As the old year ends by sinking into the infinite sea of eternity, and we stand on the threshold of the new year mysteriously veiled before us, serious thoughts of eternity take hold of us. How vital it is in this busy time of hustle and bustle to stand still! We must carefully reflect in our hearts about our past, while at the same time, casting a glance into the future.

In light of eternity, seeing things from a proper perspective through the lens of God's Word is so important. The Psalmist writes, "Indeed, You have made my days *as* handbreadths" (Psalm 39: 5). Our life is like a vapor that lasts only a very short time and then disappears forever.

What is "time"? It is unlikely any human being can give the completely correct meaning of it. Time is only a very short and insignificant fragment of never-ending eternity, only a breath, only the minutest moment compared to eternity.

Do you, O Soul, know the value of time? It is a gift of God entrusted to you to be used for God's glory, for the salvation and welfare of your fellow man, and for your own preparation for eternity. Your eternal destiny depends on the use of the short span of time available to you on earth. Your condition in eternity is dependent on how you utilize this short time, and is therefore a lot of responsibility.

Everybody is approached by an opportunity they must seize. Everyone has a choice to make at a certain time. We come to a crossroads, one of which leads downward, down to perdition, and the other to the light of our eternal home. What an exceedingly serious thought this is. How many have chosen the way to perdition who must regret it for all time and eternity!

What will the new year bring us? Only God knows the future, but His children can see the signs of the times, foreshadows of things to come. Greater and more serious events are surely in store for us, and everything is coming to an end. Let us be sober, watchful, and prayerful, for the Lord will come at an hour when we do not expect it.

Dear Soul, maintain quiet contemplation. Stand still and look back at the past, and forward to the future. Say with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties. And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139: 23–24). Additionally, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith and how your soul is doing right now. Ask yourself, "How have I spent the time that has passed? For whom have I lived? What were the motives of my heart? Is it selfishness, self-interest or is it love for God that drives me to act? What fruits have I produced for eternity? Have I made progress in my spiritual life? Am I on the right path at all, or have the little foxes managed to sneak into my vineyard to destroy the vines?" Examine yourself seriously, dear Soul, because self-deception is so easy, and Satan makes very special efforts to seduce souls, blind their spiritual eyes, and make them believe all is well with them.

Let us walk carefully, and lead such a prayer life that God's name will be glorified and that many more souls will be saved. Let us fight and pray so the new year will be used for God and eternity as never before. Let us live as if every day is the last, so everyone may be ready to meet their God, to give an account of their life, and to appear richly-laden with fruits before the Lord.

J. G.

A Bold Testimony

A little shoeshine boy in London used to go regularly to a Christian house of worship. One Christmas Eve, he was once again in attendance. What he heard there deeply touched his heart, and he too wanted to serve the Savior from that moment

on. Early the following morning, on Christmas Day, he was again at his shoeshine post.

Suddenly, he called out to a passing gentleman, who by all appearances had been partying through the night, "Clean your boots, sir?" The young man took one look at his dirty boots and muttered with a curse, "If I had any money left on me, sure! It certainly would be necessary." Before he knew it, however, the little shoeshine boy had already knelt down, looked the man in the face, and said, "Please, sir, may I clean them for free?"

"Why would you do that?" the young man asked.

The shoeshine boy stammered in confusion, "Well, it's cold, I'd like to stay warm, and I haven't had anything to do yet either, and I'd like to do it." To humor him, the gentleman allowed it.

When the work was finished, he asked the boy again, "Tell me again why you did that?"

"Because it's Jesus' birthday today," the little lad answered bravely, "and I wanted to do something for Him. Yesterday it was said down there at the

service that if we do anything nice for anyone, we do it for the Savior!"

"Oh!" sneered the man, "have they got their hands on you, those old people?" The child's eyes filled with tears, and the man, noticing this, suddenly stopped, lifted his hat a little, and said, "Oh, forgive me if I have spoken like that about your friends!"

Many years passed by. One Christmas Day, a prominent businessman, along with his wife and children, sat in the church and listened to the sermon of a man who told how he had come to believe in the authenticity of the Christian faith through a little shoeshine boy. And that businessman was the former shoeshine boy. ■

Thus Far

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD helped us’” (1 Samuel 7: 12).

I can still vividly remember my father’s words. I often heard him say, “Through this moment, God has helped us. What will happen next?” He went through a lot in his life, and had many prayers answered and experienced God’s nearness and guidance. But as he was aging, his concern quietly surfaced of how he would carry on.

Uncertainty seems inherent to our world today, as all around us people speak of crises and dangers. In addition, everything is subject to unpredictable change, which also affects our lives. What will the future hold?

Looking Back

The year 2022 is mostly behind us. We all had personal experiences and adventures, not all of them pleasant. We may have had times of great hardship and struggle, weakness, and uncertainty. But we’ve also experienced our heavenly Father’s powerful hand at work.

After a long journey, there is something special about reminiscing. Memories surface of the beautiful highlights and the challenges that occurred. As you look further back in your life, you can see the loving and powerful hand of God, and evidence of His wisdom and comfort guiding you, and of His blessings

upon your family. Once, David exclaimed, “Who *am* I, O LORD God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?” (1 Chronicles 17: 16). God keeps His pledges and promises (Psalm 33: 4).

Paul expresses similar sentiments in 1 Corinthians 15: 9: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy” Can you also look back at your life, your failures, stumbling, weariness, and yet, the indescribable goodness, patience, mercy, and grace of God? God embraced us with His love and repeatedly encouraged, strengthened, realigned, and carried us. He continued to entrust us with new tasks and blessed us. He did so, though we did not deserve it. Do you see the patience and mercy of the Father? Through Scripture and the preaching of God’s Word, He has strengthened, refocused, and encouraged us. Yes, it’s true: The Lord has carried me thus far.

Looking Ahead

It is a great privilege to say with Samuel, Thus far—every single day of my life—the Lord has helped me. God, the Rock in the stormy surge, the Refuge in darkness and fear. He, the Eternal, is our safe haven. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is not a distant God. He is not an uncertain yearning or just a hope.



He is my Father. I can know Him and live with Him every day. Even if I do not feel His presence, I know with certainty, He is very close to me and holds me in His hand.

In His wisdom, God has given the world stability and balance. He has initiated and maintained the steady circle of life. He is the provider of man and creatures. The power of His will guarantees our continuance until Christ's return. This eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent God sustains everything by His Word (Hebrews 1:3) and is at the same time our very personal, loving Father and God. He bends down to us, caresses our souls, and encourages us through Isaiah: "Fear not, for I *am* with you; be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (41:10). In Isaiah 43:1 we read, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; you *are* Mine."

None of the looming hardships, difficulties, dangers, and uncertainties are greater than our God. True, when we look to ourselves, to our weakness and limited knowledge, we may become fearful. Or, if we listen to the demagogues and alarmists, we may despair of life. But on the threshold of the new year, we have the simultaneously gentle and powerful word, "Be still, and

know that I *am* God" (Psalm 46:10). The next verse says, "The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge." Yes, the psalmist also experienced and lived through turbulent times, but he countered them with a "nevertheless" and begins the psalm with, "God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; *though* its waters roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with its swelling."

Therefore, we may confidently look to the future, since our past experiences prove the faithfulness of God. His Word gives us the assurance that this help will be available tomorrow as well. Even when our strength begins to fade, when pain reduces prayer into a desperate sigh, our Father carries us through. His goal is to guide us safely to the eternal harbor. His grace and strength are sufficient for each day. His patience and mercy lift us up when our strength and willpower fail.

"Happy *are* the people whose God *is* the LORD!" (Psalm 144:15b).

"Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God" (Psalm 146:5).

Hermann Vogt



Thoughts As the Clock Strikes Twelve

What's really so special about it? Every day, the clock strikes twelve and then again at midnight, year in, and year out. There's no difference than when it strikes five, or eight, or ten o'clock. Certainly, it indicates the fact that the clock's long hand advanced one hour.

But Time Is Advancing.

Don't You Realize How Mysterious This Actually Is?

No power in the world can stop it. One can switch off the clockwork, but then only the hands stand still, and time nevertheless runs hurriedly onward, always at the same pace.

If it only continued for itself, that would not be bad, but we must all keep up with it. We must. There is no hesitation and no lingering. We are urged, chased, and driven forward, whether we want it or not. Forward, onward. How eerie is the quiet ticking of the clock in our room, whose steady beat constantly shortens our life! Usually, we don't even think about these things. We have so many more important things to think about.

But once in a while at least, we listen eagerly for the twelve o'clock strike.

When the old year fades away and the bell towers begin to peal: one, two, three, four, until the twelfth stroke has sounded—somehow that touches almost everyone's heart. We don't need to be sentimental at all. Even a celebration at the turn of the year in a noisy, high-spirited mood in a circle of boisterous people, signifies that this twelve o'clock stroke is significant. Another milestone has been crossed on that ceaseless trek.

How Many More Will You Still Have?

Who knows! Many things would be easier and simpler if, during the transition from the old year to the new year, the fog would break for a few moments, and we would be allowed to see how far the path still stretches. Then we could be prepared for it. But the fog is too thick. We only hear the clock strike twelve, and already it's time to go on, and on. Maybe we'll pass a lot of mile markers; but then again, maybe there won't be any.

However, if you don't know how long your journey will last, do you at least know where it's going? When twelve o'clock strikes on New Year's Eve, some might find it a haunting alarm of time disappearing. If God Himself were to ask every person,



“Where Are You Going?”

No one should say they don't know. We must know! It is irresponsible and careless not to concern ourselves with the destination of life's journey. If you really don't know, then consider this truth:

You Are Inescapably Heading for the Day of Judgment.

If that day comes this coming year, would you be ready? Is your accounting accurate? What have you gained from the past year? Perhaps you look back on it with satisfaction. But are you only satisfied? Are there no transgressions, reasons to fear, or to be troubled if an expected review were done?

Recently, I had to cross over the border. Although I had a one-hundred-percent good conscience, there was nonetheless a strange tension in me, that attacks me every time I have to go through border control. But what is this superficial, human control compared to the gaze of God's flaming eyes that search every corner of the most hidden detail of our lives? Every crossing of the threshold from one year to the next reminds us urgently to put our affairs in order between us and God, while we still have the possibil-

ity to do so, before we reach the last crossing point where there is no turning back. How can you put things in order?

You Can't, But Jesus Christ Can.

There is a reason the Bible specifically calls him “Savior.” Savior is the One Who can heal what is broken and sick. He is the One God gave us, in Whom we can take courage when we fear crossing to the other side. All the many things we simply cannot cope with ourselves, our failures, our shortcomings, our defeats, our sins, everything can be surrendered to Him.

When the clock strikes twelve on New Year's Eve, you can reach out to the Savior. But even earlier would be better, preferably right now, so His peace can fill your heart. Thank Him that you've been able to walk through the year to the end.

Confess everything to Him, and if necessary to others as well, and believe in His forgiveness. Ask Him to accompany you into the new year, to always give you victory, and to help you reach your goals, and your final destination.

A. B.



A Fateful New Year's Eve



It was a splendid last evening of the year. Despite the late season, the weather was mild, and the moon illuminated the earth in beautiful splendor.

It may have been about 11:00 p.m. at night when two young men followed a throng of people out of a theater. Silently, they trudged along to walk the short distance to their apartment complex. Thomas was thinking about the tragedy he had just seen; for his friend, Julian, it had already faded into oblivion. Inaudible to others, the Spirit of God was speaking to Thomas: "In just one hour, an arduous year will have ended its course, giving way to the dawning of a new one." His conscience was suddenly heavy with a strange regret for all the follies he had committed in his life. A heartfelt desire arose in him to not repeat the transgressions of the past year.

At last, the perplexing solitude became unbearable to Julian. He suddenly broke the silence with the words, "Thomas, why are you in such a serious mood today? You're acting as though you were returning home from a funeral."

"To tell you the truth, I don't feel quite comfortable with the thought of having been a fool for so long,"

came his reply. "And it seems to me I should begin to grow wiser as soon as tomorrow."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Julian. "It seems your good cheer has left you or some evil spirit has frightened you. Drop the gloomy mood!"

"My somber mood is a mystery to me too," he countered. "And yet I feel dissatisfied with myself."

"Not even a saint is pleased with himself, so this shouldn't bother you at all," his friend Julian replied with a smile. "Now, first of all, you need to get into a better mood. You're as grumpy as a gravedigger. You won't be any good for tonight's festivities."

At the corner, they stopped to part ways. They shook hands in farewell, and each went to his own apartment.

Thomas' frame of mind was rattled. An unusual emotion, nobler and purer than had ever gripped him before, had arisen in him at the thought of the departing year. His multitude of transgressions appeared vividly before his soul, and he made a resolution to start immediately to lead a better course of life.

Thomas was actually close to carrying out this resolution, had he not at that moment thought of Julian.

He had practically made a promise to his best friend to drive away those “annoying moral principles.” Shouldn’t he keep his word to him?

It is an unfortunate moment when one chooses to “keep an obligation” when it is wrong to do so. Sadly, such a decision often has far-reaching consequences and can determine eternal peace or woe.

Regrettably, Thomas stifled the thought awakened within. Stepping into his room, he soon lay down in bed. But by consciously suppressing his earlier prompting, he hardened his heart and grieved the Holy Spirit.

After the friends had parted, Julian brooded as he continued on his way. “What a foolish notion for a young man,” he thought. “What a cloud of gloom has settled over Thomas’ cheerful nature!”

Julian could not get rid of the thought and became as restless as Thomas had been. His inner uneasiness increased, and he could not shake off the burden that had so suddenly descended upon his soul. He thought of his mother, now resting in the cemetery for two years, and of her last words, which he dared not recall. He sat down in his suite and stared into the starlit night. The light of the moon illuminated his face. Then, a heavenly light also shone down on him. At his bedside, Julian fell to his knees in prayer, and faced the difficult struggle in his heart. But who could describe the elation he felt as he triumphantly emerged, victorious from his fierce battle? It was a strange joyfulness, unknown to him until that moment. He decided to start a new life immediately, not on the coming New Year’s Day, but right at the hour of his decision! He vowed to remain faithful in difficult times to come. He asked God for strength to sustain him in his resolution.

Reflecting on the divine transformation of his life, Julian sat in silence for half an hour. The first chime of the clock tower announcing the last moments of the old year roused him from his deep musing. “Thanks be to God!” he exclaimed. Rising, he stated, “May every hour of my life be an avid reminder to fulfill my worthy resolutions!”

Many years had elapsed through the passage of time. Again, it was New Year’s Eve. The night was dark. Thick snowflakes settled on a despondent man who walked gloomily through the street in a torn suit. His gait was stiff, and his cheeks sunken. The world seemed to have treated him badly. He had battled hardship and misery and was a victim of addiction. At this moment,

he was sober, since he lacked the money for intoxicating drinks.

He approached a stately building and stopped in front of the steps. On the top step stood a distinguished gentleman with gifts, waiting for the front door to be opened. The beggar approached him, asking for a little something. Without much hesitation, the gentleman descended a few steps and handed the beggar some money. A sympathetic gaze for the needy man accompanied the small gift. The beggar did not even thank his benefactor for the gift he had received. With greedy anticipation, his glazed eyes peered at the money in his hand. Immediately, a burning thirst for a stiff drink was vehemently awakened in him.

They parted ways, the blessed, contented man, as well as the wretched, miserable one. One was respected, the other despised. Seventeen years ago, they had also parted ways on New Year’s Eve. At that time, they were good friends. Today, they had met and parted without even recognizing each other. The transformation that had taken place so long ago was drastic. One had been converted to Christ and had grown in grace. The other had spent the best years of his life in sin and was now consumed by a life of debauchery. Today they parted once more, never to meet again.

The snowflakes fell thicker and heavier, and the wind became cutting and fierce. The people on the street wrapped themselves tightly in their coats and hurried to seek shelter from the icy wind.

The wide street had become desolate; only one person was noticeable. He staggered from side to side, banging his head and limbs on lampposts. Haltingly, he made his way to the river at the end of the street. The wind howled around him, and he answered its raging with blasphemous curses. The route led him toward certain destruction.

The sound of the current hit his ear. With mad howls, he answered the raging waters. But his voice was drowned out by the storm and the roar of the waves. No one heard him or rushed to his rescue. He staggered; he fell; he sank. The clock tower announced the midnight hour.

“Do not quench the Spirit.” God’s warnings and admonitions knock on every heart. There is hardly a soul who has not experienced this at some point. Certainly, the Lord wants all to be saved. Have you not also heard the loving voice of the Holy Spirit, beckoning you? What is your answer? ■

Advent

I wandered along Lake Como toward the charming villa which lies at the tip of a long peninsula cloistered in solitude. An elderly groundskeeper unlocked the heavy gate and led me through a delightfully appointed garden.

I had the following conversation with him:

“How long have you been here?”

“Twenty-four years.”

“And how often has the lady of the house been here during that time?”

“Four times.”

“When was the last time?”

“Twelve years ago. I am almost always alone—it is very rare that a stranger looks in.”

“But you have the garden so well appointed and so meticulously maintained that your mistress could come tomorrow!”

“Oggi, Signore, oggi (Today, my Lord, today)” was the reply he gave—and how deeply it moved me.

That is how we, as Christians, should be prepared for the coming of our Lord, for “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.”