



Foundation of Faith

A Savior Is Born To You!

He Came For Me!

Jesus Heals the Brokenhearted

Reflecting on Christmas

At the Turn of the Year



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Editorial

Dear Reader,

Every year we celebrate Christmas, the night our Savior was born. Although the exact date is unknown and is not critical for us to know, Scripture proclaims: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4).

Do we understand and fully appreciate that the time was completed? That the time set by God for the birth of His Son unfolded according to a wonderful divine plan? Yet for all humanity at that time, it was a mystery; it was still veiled—not revealed.

Right at the Bible’s beginning, we find a clue. After the fall in the Garden of Eden, we have the first indication: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). This was said to Adam and Eve, but the facts concerning Joseph, Mary, and Bethlehem were hidden and not evident.

Next, we find another clue in the Old Testament: “A star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).

Further, we receive wonderful hints, especially from the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). In chapter 9, verse 6, we are given further names: “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

What had been concealed from the world was revealed in Bethlehem. God even sent an angel and the heavenly hosts: “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” (Luke 2:10–11).

Yes, dear Reader, pick up the Word of God and read Luke 2 where you will find the fulfillment of God’s divine plan, which includes you!

H. D. Nimz

The Neighbor

The Wildi family who lived on Levee Street was known to quarrel often. Sometimes it was the husband who started the argument, sometimes the wife. It seemed that especially during the holidays, all mayhem would break loose in their home. And now it was that time of year again, just before Christmas. This time it was worse than ever.

Strangely enough, however, as soon as the arguing between the couple began, a silvery voice from the neighboring apartment would start to sing. Cheerful Christmas carols wafted through the air. It had to be the new neighbor who had recently moved in and hadn't yet met the Wildis.

"Why does she have to sing so loud?" the husband grumbled angrily. Mathilde, his wife, vowed to give that woman a piece of her mind.

An opportunity for that soon arose when they met at the vegetable market.

"Are you our new neighbor?" Mrs. Wildi asked the unknown woman standing next to her. When the woman nodded, Mathilde mustered up her courage and blurted out, "Perhaps you could sing your Salvation Army songs somewhere else and not right next to our living room. My husband and I aren't exactly music lovers."

"Oh, does it bother you? I'm so sorry," said Mrs. Friedmann kindly. "You see, my daughter loves to sing because it helps her to deal with things. Rosemarie has such a gentle soul. She suffers when she hears loud noises. So, she starts singing and then feels happier again."

Mathilde withdrew a bit sheepishly. She later told Robert, "We must not speak so loudly; I think they hear every word over there." And they actually kept this in mind until that evening after Christmas, when the husband came home slightly tipsy and dinner wasn't on the table yet. Harsh words noisily flew back and forth.

And there it was again, the clear voice from the neighboring apartment. "Merry Christmas, everywhere . . ." echoed joyfully through the wall.

"That's it, I've had enough!" the man grumbled. "I'm going to give her a piece of my mind!" He stormed over next door.

Mrs. Friedmann greeted him warmly. "Would you like to speak with the singer?" she asked gently. "Of course, Rosemarie will be happy to meet her neighbor."

She led him into a bright bedroom. There, lying among the pillows, was a young woman, about 20 years old, with hollow cheeks and twisted limbs. But from her pale face, two beautiful, radiant eyes shone at the visitor.

"Are you sick?" Mr. Wildi asked, taken aback.

"Rosemarie has a spinal cord disease; she's been bedridden for three years now," explained the mother.

When the man wanted to express his sympathy, the young woman waved it away energetically. "I'm still doing quite well. I'm not poor! After all, Jesus is always with me and helps me bear my burden. That's how I get through each day. And one day, all pain and suffering will be over, and I'll be able to walk again."

Mr. Wildi went home quietly and thoughtfully. His young neighbor had taught him a valuable lesson. He felt ashamed of himself and silently vowed to tone down his loud outbursts for the sake of this girl.

"Did you give her a piece of your mind?" his wife asked when he returned. The man shook his head. "If only you knew, Mathilde, who lives over there. Please, go see for yourself. And take our Christmas cake along for this girl. Please."

What had happened to Robert? He seemed like a changed man to Mathilde. With a sigh, the woman took the cake she had baked with so much love and did as her husband asked.

When she returned home a half hour later, her eyes were filled with tears. "You should play something on the piano for the girl too; she would surely appreciate it, and you play so well."

"Do you think so, Dear? Well, I'll give it a try." He sat down at the piano. "What should it be?"

"A Christmas carol, I think."

He began to play, and suddenly his wife joined in with her strong voice: "O how joyfully, O how merrily Christmas comes with its grace divine!"

In the other apartment, the sick girl listened. She folded her hands, closed her eyes, and thanked God for the new sounds that flowed through the thin wall instead of the quarreling. Now Christmas had truly arrived! ■

At the Mountain Inn

Two brothers, who lived in a large city, were passionate skiers. The two days of Christmas holidays were too short for them to head to the mountains for their winter sport, so they always set out on the day before Christmas Eve in order to get there early.

This year was no different. Soon, they were sitting on the train that chugged its way up the mountain. Outside, it was already dark, and it was snowing continuously. The snow covered the roofs and trees, and the two brothers were delighted at the sight.

Later, while sitting at a table in a restaurant, they studied their map and planned their tour. Their plan was to reach the foot of the summit on December 24th, to get to the mountain lodge on the 25th, and to descend into the valley over the summit the next day in order to catch the last train back to the city.

When they arrived late on Christmas Eve in the mountain village, the snowfall had become even heavier. The villagers warned them that a dangerously large amount of snow had already fallen and reminded them of the avalanches that claimed lives every year.

Before the innkeeper wished the brothers a good night, he asked, “Would you perhaps like to join us for the Christmas Eve service? We’ll set out at 11:30 p.m., as the walk will take over an hour in this snow.”

The brothers considered it briefly. “I’d rather stay here,” said the elder. “I need to be fresh and rested for our big tour tomorrow morning. But I’ll send my guardian angel with you as I don’t need him while I’m sleeping.”

“Besides, you’ll have more company for the singing of ‘Hallelujah,’” the younger joked.

But the innkeeper didn’t take these mocking words lightly. “I don’t like hearing that,” he replied coldly. “If you send your guardian angel off so easily, you might regret it.” Without another word, he closed the door behind him. The brothers tried to laugh it off, but their

mood was spoiled. Eventually, they went up to their room and lay down to sleep.

In the middle of the night, the elder brother suddenly woke up with a start. There was a clinking noise at the window! Had someone thrown a snowball at it? But then the whole house began to shake. With a loud crash, the window shattered, and a white gust rushed in. No, it wasn’t a gentle breeze—it was a raging storm, a white flood: snow, snow, snow! The snow filled the room, covered the beds, and flew into their faces and eyes. The younger brother, who had also woken up, shouted, “An avalanche!”

Then suddenly, the room became quiet. They still

heard some dull banging sounds below before everything became completely still. The two brothers climbed out of their beds, which were now buried under a thick layer of snow, and grasped their way through the room. They bumped into overturned

chairs and crooked tables, wading slowly through the snow. One of them eventually found the light switch and tried to turn on the light—to no avail. He tried to open the door, but it only budged a small crack at the top. It wouldn’t move at all at the bottom. The other brother groped his way to the window, cutting himself on the sharp shards of glass and starting to bleed. They were trapped! What time could it be?

Maybe it was only midnight? Were the other guests in the house also buried? But they still had a glimmer of hope: perhaps the innkeeper would still be returning with his family from the Christmas Eve service. Then, suddenly they heard a clock chime downstairs: one, two! And then, they heard them—voices outside!

It wasn’t long before the innkeeper was able to reach them. He was able to free his two guests from their snowy prison. In a less damaged room, a belated Christmas Eve celebration solemnly took place. There wasn’t much talking, but there was a lot of thinking, gratitude, and even some singing. ▶

*The younger brother,
who had also
woken up, shouted,
“An avalanche!”*

The back rooms on the ground floor were completely filled with snow. That's where the innkeeper's adult children usually slept. If they hadn't gone to the church service, none of them would have survived. On the first floor, the compacted snow reached table height. In such a dire situation, there wasn't much left to say. Hadn't "Someone" already spoken? Yes, God Himself!

The next day when the brothers packed their belongings and asked the innkeeper for the bill he re-

plied, "Technically, you didn't stay the night with us, so I can't really charge you. But if you want to give something, put it in the collection box of the small mountain church—as thanks to God for sending so many angels on this Christmas Eve. Maybe it wasn't just an angel, for a single guardian angel might not have sufficed. It was likely the Lord Himself, Whom we sang about in the Christmas Eve service: 'Christ the Savior is born!' He saved you from death. Thank Him for that!" ■

He Came For Me!

"Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.'" (Mark 10: 21)

When we look at Jesus' conduct here on Earth, we see that He was always interested in the individual. He had come to seek and save that which was lost, not in a generalized way, but for the individual, for you and me. When we consider who Jesus is, where He came from, and what it cost Him, we can't help but be amazed!

He, the God of creation, left everything, sacrificed Himself and came to this world for me! This God is He who spreads out the universe with its countless billions of galaxies. Among them is our Milky Way, which is only a tiny dot with about 100 billion stars. One of these stars is the sun, small and inconspicuous compared to the whole. Orbiting around the sun is a small planet that we call Earth, on which over eight billion people live. And yet this God, who is so great and sublime, came through all these infinite expanses to look for me! He came to help me, to love me, and to save me. And that doesn't just apply to me, but also to you! Who can believe it; where does our amazement end?

Everyone who experienced Jesus experienced Him in a very personal way. The shepherds who were the first to arrive after His birth were forever changed and began to tell others about Him, praising and glorifying God. The wise men bowed down and worshiped. When Jesus began His mission, He always looked for

the individual who needed His help.

We think of the calling of the disciples. Peter knew immediately what it was all about: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5: 8). There was Mary Magdalene: Jesus sought out this wretched, broken, sinful, and demon-infested human being and healed her. No wonder she constantly followed Him afterwards!

Jesus was on His way to Jairus' house. The case was very urgent because Jairus' daughter was terminally ill! Then a hand, shy and otherwise unnoticed, "came from behind" those who were around Jesus "and touched the hem of His garment." None of the disciples could believe that Jesus was now stopping. But a poor, sick woman needed Him at that moment, and Jesus' attention and benevolence were completely focused on her. Trembling, she confessed that it was she who had touched Him, and she was allowed to hear: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

There was the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus came straight to him through the crowd and healed him. He obviously saw his pain and hopelessness, and his heart's cry.

We think of Bartimaeus. He cried out through the crowd in Jericho for Jesus' help. Others threatened him and tried to silence him, but he would not be



stopped. We read in Mark 10: 49: “Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called.” Specifically him, in the midst of such a noisy, pressing crowd. Had Jesus come through Jericho at that time because of him? It was his moment with Jesus—and he was healed.

And then there was Zacchaeus. Jesus came through Jericho again, and this time the scene took place up in a tree. Zacchaeus needed rescue, he needed a Savior, because he couldn’t go on living like this. And Jesus stopped, looked up directly at him, and said: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”

Jesus had also come for those who rejected Him. The introductory text tells of a rich young man who longed for eternal life. But he could not let go of his earthly wealth. What did Jesus do? He looked at him and “loved him.” Jesus wanted to help him so much. Yes, how sad that He knew the young man would turn his back on Him. But Jesus was there just for him and loved him. Did the young man ever turn back to Jesus’ love? The Bible is silent on this.

And so we could continue the list. Even when He was hanging on the cross, Jesus cared for the individual. Yes, even for a thief who deserved to hang there! The thief on the cross might have thought: “He came for me. He hangs here for me! And I can find salvation

and be saved in His wounds and His sacrifice. Praise be to God!” For the thief proclaimed, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23: 42).

Yes, Jesus came for me and also for you, for each of us personally. His coming and His sacrifice were also for you, whoever you are. From the worst, most depraved sinner to the most self-righteous Pharisee, everyone is included, even the innocent baby who was snatched from life prematurely. Whoever we are, we get to believe it and, even more than that, we get to experience it personally: Jesus came for me.

Are you perhaps still far from Him and can’t believe that there is hope for you? Is Christmas an empty and meaningless celebration for you? Then listen to the angels’ message at the first Christmas: “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). Remember that this glorious message of joy is for everyone! Read it again: “which will be to all people.” For unto *you* is born the Savior, Jesus, your Savior and Redeemer. Just as He came for me, He also came for you. Let Him into your heart and life and you will experience it: “He came for me!”

*Ron Taron
Steinbach, Manitoba*

The Miracle

God's Son Born As a Child

When we look at the events associated with Christmas, we see nothing but miracles. What are these miracles?

The Trinity

Some time ago, I was surprised when someone I was unfamiliar with asked me: “If Jesus is God, how could God be in heaven and on earth at the same time?”

From a human point of view, we have to stand in amazement before this question of the Triune God (God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and say: “Right, impossible.”

If our faith depended on human wisdom and logic, it would fail. But thank God, faith extends far beyond our human capacity for thought. Our faith is based on His Word and looks to God's power and omnipotence.

“When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3: 4–6).

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are united in the unique, incomprehensible work of salvation for us. Praise God for this miracle.

The omnipotence of God displayed in a child

This too is beyond our comprehension. The Almighty Creator of the earth and the universe, who holds everything in His hand and fills the whole universe with His presence, humbled Himself and came to us as a child! When we hold a small baby in our arms, helpless and completely dependent, our minds cannot reconcile the reality of this thought. It seems like a contradiction. Yet divinity and humanity united in Jesus, who was born as a child. An astounding miracle!

Born of a virgin

Born of a virgin? That is unrealistic, isn't it? When the angel announced the birth of Christ to Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary was shocked and said: “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

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: 34–35).

It is of importance that the angel added: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (verse 37).

We humans are so inclined that we wish to understand everything and be able to explain it logically before we accept it. But here the angel makes it clear that God can do much more than we humans can understand and comprehend. At this point, we again encounter the miracle of the Trinity. God, through the Holy Spirit, performs a miracle.

The heavenly welcome

Never before, throughout all history, has a royal child had angels announce its birth and a choir of angels appear when it was born. But heaven was set in motion when this child was born.

Angels appeared several times. First, an angel announced the birth of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. Then an angel spoke to Mary. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, and angels also announced the actual birth of Jesus Himself. It was an angel who came down from heaven to tell the shepherds in the field that Christ was born. He was joined by the heavenly hosts saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14). A tremendous choir, indeed!

A special star appeared in the sky, leading the searching wise men from the East to the newborn child.

Heaven was present at this event!

Rejected by men—the miracle of humility

While heaven rejoiced and celebrated, Jesus was rejected by men. There was not even room for Him in the inn.

No royal reception, no palace and riches! He was born in a stable and was then laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. What debasement God took



upon Himself! What an act of humility! What an astounding miracle that the King of kings descended so low.

The earthly parents of Jesus were not royal or upper-class. His father was a carpenter. People at that time said things like, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? (Matthew 13: 55) and “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1: 46). Yes, a heavenly king became a lowly citizen and had to deal with rejection and contempt.

The parents had to flee with the child to Egypt to escape having the child murdered by Herod. Here too God sent an angel to advise the parents. The reason was that King Herod was afraid that the newborn child would vie for his throne.

Only a few people recognized that this child was the Savior of the world and the promised Messiah.

The greatest miracle

The greatest miracle of all is that this child actually gave His life as a personal sacrifice for you and me. The idea that Jesus came for all people and bore the sins of all mankind is easier to grasp. But the fact that Jesus, apart from all other people, made this sacrifice just for *me* is almost too mind-boggling to comprehend. Yet, it is true. He had you and me in mind when He gave His life and shed His blood for us.

The child grew to become an adult. In Luke 2: 40, we read, “And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” He lived in obedience to His heavenly Father and fulfilled His will until He died on the cross.

The miracle of salvation is fulfilled with the cross and the resurrection. The great plan of salvation is complete.

In this Child, we have everything we need to be redeemed and eternally happy. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8: 32).

It is in wonder and adoration that we contemplate the great miracle of the incarnation. We remember the manger and give Jesus our thanks and adoration! We will experience a final miracle when we will one day bow our own knees before the throne of the King of kings and join with many thousands in thanks, praise, and adoration.

Have you experienced the miracle of salvation and accepted it as your own?

May God make this miracle of a tiny Child in the manger important and meaningful to us.

*Dina Grötzingler
Eppingen, Germany*



The Messiah Has Come!

At Christmastime, songs of joy and peace are in the air as we think of gifts, friends, and guests. Isn't this a reflection of the events heralding the arrival of the Messiah some 2000 years ago? The angels proclaimed that Christ was born in the city of David and sang of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14). With the birth of the Messiah, God's glory from the highest

heaven came down to earth to bring humankind peace so that the goodwill and blessings of God might rest upon us all.

That night the angels spoke, and heaven touched the earth. They announced that the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, had come—God's greatest gift to us all. The Christ Child was anointed by His heavenly Father to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21). The angels

proclaimed that the Child was born as our Savior and as Christ the Lord in the city of David (Luke 2:10–14). God Himself was entering into human history to bring us peace through His only Son, whose name was to be called Jesus. This fulfilled the wonderful prophecy of Isaiah 9:6–7, that a child would be given to us who was called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”! God’s Son would reign on the throne of David and establish an everlasting spiritual kingdom.

Centuries prior to the birth of Jesus, God had made known the signs of the Messiah’s coming, that there should be no mistake in identifying Christ as Lord and Messiah. What an amazing Savior who with His coming would fulfill some 100 Old Testament prophecies! Such incredible predictions we read of in no other religious book of a prophet or teacher to come—none! For example, the prophet Micah writes some 700 years prior to the event that the Messiah to come would be born in the small town of Bethlehem in Judah (Micah 5:2). In no other city or village of the many in Judah could He be born. God so guided the events of history that because of Caesar’s census requiring all in his empire to be registered, Mary and Joseph left their home in Nazareth to travel to the place of their birth in Bethlehem. Soon after they arrived there, Jesus was born, and the prophecy of old was fulfilled (Luke 2:1–7)!

For the first and last time in history, it was prophesied that a virgin would conceive and bear a child. Isaiah the prophet writes some seven centuries earlier that the Messiah would be a descendant of the House of David and be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:13–14; 9:7). In the New Testament, this is fulfilled in Jesus as Matthew (Matthew 1:18–25) writes of Mary the virgin conceiving a child by the Holy Spirit and bearing a Son whose name is given by Isaiah as Immanuel or “God with us.”

Later, the wise men from the East would come bearing gifts fit for a king. They would fall down before the Child and worship Him as Lord (Matthew 2:1–12). This would fulfill the prophecies of Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 60:6. King Herod was jealous of the birth of another king and planned to destroy the child. Warned by an angel, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt (Matthew 2:13–15) so that the prophecy would be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Hosea 11:1). The enraged King Herod proceeded to kill all the

male children two years and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding area (Matthew 2:16–18), sadly fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15.

Immanuel, God with us, was God’s gift of saving grace to us! Jesus was the Anointed One, anointed to heal the sick, save the lost, proclaim the good news of salvation, die for our sins on the cross, and rise again on the third day triumphant! All of these events are anchored in the prophecies of the old covenant and are fulfilled to the last detail in the New Testament. Not a single one of these Old Testament prophecies could be missed or Jesus would not be the Messiah!

During Jesus’ brief life of some 33 years, He lived as Messiah and perfectly fulfilled every prophecy spoken by the prophets of old. The four cornerstones of these prophecies were, firstly, His incarnation or birth as mentioned above; secondly, His anointed ministry of healing as foretold in Isaiah 61:1–2. This was fulfilled by His life of countless miracles as Jesus claimed, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (see Luke 4:16–21). Thirdly, Jesus was anointed as the Lamb of God and would die as our sin offering. Over 30 prophecies describe the death of the Messiah in detail. Many of these prophecies are fulfilled at the cross and vividly described in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. The final cornerstone of the Messiah is His triumphant resurrection from the dead. David promises in Psalm 16:8–11 that the Holy One would not see corruption. As Jesus promised, He would rise from the dead on the third day. All four Gospels attest to this glorious cornerstone of our faith in the Messiah, who is Jesus the Christ!

As we ponder these prophecies of old, we stand in awe of God’s Son who fulfilled them. We realize that the Messiah has truly come, and His blessings are available to all. This gift of God’s grace is offered freely to all who seek Him with a repentant and humble heart. Have you allowed Christ to anoint your life with His blessings of forgiveness and a new spiritual life? Jesus, full of grace and truth, wishes to become your personal Savior. If in faith you accept this amazing gift of grace, it will bring Christmas into your heart. Jesus will become your Messiah, and your heart will join in with the melody of old, rejoicing in those glad tidings of joy and peace. Truly then—Christmas has come!

*Harry Klinger
Winnipeg, Manitoba*

Jesus Heals the Brokenhearted

“The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)

Recently, I read the story of a family who, in the midst of joyful Christmas preparations, suddenly and unexpectedly fell into a deep crisis. The mother had been mentally distressed for some time, which her family refused to acknowledge. But now, so close to the festive season, it became clear that a longer stay in a psychiatric clinic would be necessary. The teenage daughter saw the despair and hopelessness in her father’s eyes and was faced with the challenging task of having to manage the household and care for her younger sister, as well as attending school.

She painfully realized that nothing would ever be the same again. Her carefree life was over in the blink of an eye. The joy of Christmas was shattered, her own dreams for the future shattered, the feeling of safety and security shattered. Her despair was soon joined by bitterness towards God, who had apparently allowed a family to fall into a misfortune that they did not deserve. Sunk in deep self-pity, she was often no longer able to treat her little sister and her father with kindness and repeatedly hurt them with her moody behavior.

On the morning of December 24, she was allowed to visit her mother in the clinic for the first time. While sitting in the waiting room, the nagging questions, even resentment against God, rose up in her again. Her state of mind must have been reflected in her face, because an elderly lady sitting next to her spoke to her sympathetically. She looked so sad, she said, it didn’t fit in with Christmas at all.

Surprisingly, the young girl immediately confided in the person sitting next to her. She told her about her worries and problems and poured out her whole heart. The elderly lady gently explained to her how just one thing, namely prayer, had freed her from her own

suffering and restored her trust in God. Her son was also a patient at the clinic, and her paralyzed daughter was waiting for her at home. She had made it a habit to ask God to take care of her children, not as she wanted Him to, but as He saw fit. This had fundamentally changed her life.

Having been made to think by what she had heard, the young woman began to ask God for help in the same way. Being aware of the Christmas miracle that brought the Savior to mankind over 2000 years ago, she found her faith in God that Christmas Eve in the entrance hall of a clinic. This faith sustained her in the years that followed as her mother struggled through the difficult road to recovery. *

In the Bible, in connection with the Christmas story and the prophecy pointing to it, we are given many different names for Jesus, such as Wonderful, Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Son of the Most High, King, Mighty God. Each describes a special characteristic of Christ, the meaning of which is worth reflecting on.

The angel of God himself announced the arrival of the Son of God to the shepherds in the field on Christmas Eve with the words: “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).

The family history mentioned at the beginning shows us the deep meaning of the word “Savior” in a particularly impressive way. This name unites Jesus’ mission to bring salvation and redemption for the soul and His mission to restore our bodies and our relationships and to make them “whole.”

There are so many fragile things in our lives. Our health is vulnerable at all times. Through the tribu-

lations of life, future dreams and plans can be shattered overnight. Entire livelihoods are threatened by economic hardship or the forces of nature. Human error or misunderstandings can cause lasting damage to our trust in others. Adversity and misunderstood paths in life often jeopardize our relationship with God. Then there is sin, which has sought to destroy our relationship with God since the beginning of humanity.

Anyone who has ever been “broken” in one way or another in their life knows the awfulness of this state. The longing for someone to put all the broken pieces of life back together again, to bring light and salvation into the darkness and hopelessness, is immense.

God sent His Son, the Savior, into this world precisely for this purpose. He came to restore the broken relationship between us and our Creator and to free us from our rebellion against God. He wants our tarnished relationship with our fellow human beings to be transformed into a good relationship. He also enables us to experience help for our fragile bodies.

Although the state of being broken feels anything but pleasant for us humans, in God’s eyes it is often the beginning of something new and better. God draws near to us precisely in the valleys and the breaking points of our lives. Our own helplessness makes us all too aware of the dependence of our happiness in God. While we are in the state of brokenness, in His infinite love He is already stretching out His arms to us to help and heal.

The family in our story experienced all of this. First, the mother’s health broke and with it the family’s happiness. Doubts about a loving God brought communication with the heavenly Father to a standstill. The once warm-hearted family bond began to crack

because the individual was only concerned with herself in her grief. The family could no longer come to grips with their problems on their own.

Dear Reader, do you recognize yourself in one of the situations described here? Perhaps you are trying to conceal the fragments of your heart in this pre-Christmas period with candlelight, picking out presents, and all the beautiful, outward embellishments of the festive season. The very good news for you is that you can become “whole” right now. The Savior has also come for you, indeed for everything that is broken about you and in you.

Perhaps you have already found salvation in Jesus and can look back on many valuable experiences with Him. You have not been broken by life’s difficult circumstances but have grown and matured. Then let God use you, especially in this busy pre-Christmas season, to seek out broken souls and share the good news of the Savior with them.

The young girl from the true story was greatly helped by the fact that the elderly lady in the waiting room of the clinic recognized her broken state and passed on her own life experience to her. She helped her to come out of her disturbed relationship with God by showing her the right way to think and pray. In this way, the Savior was able to put the pieces of her life and that of her family back together piece by piece.

At all times, we need people who testify with their lives to the saving and healing love of God. How much more now at Christmastime, when we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Brigitte Ress
Herford, Germany

(* *“How I met God on Christmas Eve,” Glenda Jones*)

Love

Revealed in Dark Times

It was a very dark time when Jesus Christ, our Savior, was born.

The Roman Emperor Augustus promoted the imperial cult in his empire. He ruled Judea and burdened the people with heavy taxes while brutally suppressing any resistance. Crucifixion was a common method of punishment by the Romans, often carried out without a trial and taking place in public on streets and crossroads. It was intended to serve as a warning to people not to rebel against the Roman regime. The census mentioned in Luke 2:1 was done for the purpose of tax collection.

At the same time, King Herod ruled Judea with extreme cruelty, executing political opponents and even his own family members whom he viewed as a threat. Herod's dismay and subsequent reaction to the wise men from the East asking about the newborn King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1–2) fit into this context. He was recognized by Rome as “King of the Jews.” His rule was marked by fear and mistrust. The additional high tax burden led to bitter poverty among the population. While a small elite who cooperated with the Romans, such as Herod, lived in abundance, many others struggled to survive. Although Herod magnificently expanded the temple, with the help of taxes, this magnificent building could not hide the deep spiritual need of the people.

In those days, God's revelations were rare. About 430 years had passed from the last Old Testament prophet Malachi to the birth of Jesus. There were many groups among the pious Jews. There were the Sadducees, who controlled the Temple and were closely linked to the Romans. They were considered corrupt and more interested in power and wealth than godliness, which repelled many Jews. Then there were the Pharisees, who attached great importance to strict external adherence to the law and numerous traditions and were respected by the people. But their hypocrisy and self-righteousness caused them to ignore the true meaning of the law—faith, love, justice, and mercy—making their worship weak and hollow. There

were also several political-religious groups that advocated violent resistance to the Roman occupation and expected a political messiah who would overthrow Rome.

Then there were also people like Simeon (Luke 2:25–35), the prophetess Anna (verses 36–38), and others. They waited for the consolation and redemption of Israel, persevering in the darkness of time. Thus, in his canticle, Zechariah spoke of the tender mercy of God who “would give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78–79). God fulfilled His promise and sent His only begotten Son.

Announced to the shepherds

The good news of the Savior's birth was first announced to simple shepherds tending their flocks at night in the fields near Bethlehem (Luke 2:8–14). While most people in the surrounding settlements slept peacefully, the shepherds kept vigil outdoors through the night. Their life was anything but comfortable; it was a hard existence, marked by loneliness and deprivation. Although their work was of great importance for agriculture, they belonged to the lowest class of society.

There were several reasons for their difficult situation. Shepherds often did not own any animals of their own but instead looked after the herds of wealthy landowners. Herding other people's animals was low-wage work in which they barely earned enough to support themselves. Then they spent most of their time far from the cities and villages, which made them social outcasts. Their living conditions were extremely simple—they rarely had a permanent residence, and they had to spend their days and nights outdoors guarding their herds from predators or thieves. Life on the fringes of society and the darkness of the night merged into a gloomy reality.

To these shepherds, the angel of the Lord appeared in the light of the glory of God. He 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). They were privileged to hear the praises of the heavenly host and accept the good news. Their earthly existence may not have changed significantly after this event, but we have every reason to believe that the morning star had risen in their hearts and filled them with divine peace and new hope.

Wonderful name

Jesus Christ, the Savior—what is the meaning of this wonderful name? When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph of Nazareth in a dream, he said, “And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The first name, Jesus (Hebrew “Yeshua,” Greek “Iēsous”), means “Yahweh (God) is salvation.”

The name Christ (Hebrew “Mashiach,” Greek “Christos”), on the other hand, is not a middle name but the title of the promised Messiah, the one anointed by God.

Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, is God, the anointed Savior—a name that contains unparalleled authority and power but at the same time an unlimited sea of God’s love and mercy; a name that gives light, life, peace and hope; truly a name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9–11)! Times, generations, and socio-political events may come and go, but this name will endure. His kingdom is not of this world but endures forever.

The shadows of death under the reigns of Augustus and Herod were terrible but only physical. But since there is a crueller reign and an eternal, far more terrible death, Jesus Christ—love personified—came from the glory of the Father to this cold earth “to destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14b–15).

Believed and witnessed today

If you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and have claimed His sacrifice on the cross for your sins, you have passed from death to life. You have access to the fatherly heart of God and are allowed to live every day in this divine kinship. Whatever happens in the world or whatever happens to you in your life, you too can triumph with Paul: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Just don’t keep this happiness to yourself. Do not tire of sharing the good news. There are still so many people today who live in darkness and the shadow of death and who have no hope in this world. Jesus Christ gave His life for them too. Let the Holy Spirit fill you completely, and be a witness of God’s love in this dark time (Acts 1:8). ■





Christmas

The Werner family is so delighted! Nicholas and Laura had a new baby brother at the end of November. The baby's name is Tobias. He has cute little hands and a sweet little face. Most of the time, Tobi sleeps and only wakes up to drink. He also asks to be fed at night and wakes Mom up, so she needs a lot of rest. Dad reminded the two siblings to look after Mom and help her. He tries to make more time for Nicholas and Laura every day. They do the housework together and talk to each other a lot.

Tonight, Dad read the Christmas story to the children. He read how Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem on Caesar Augustus' orders. Unfortunately, they couldn't find a place in the inn, so Jesus, the Son of God, was born in a stable. Because Mary only had some cloths, she wrapped Him in those and laid the baby in a manger. Later, Joseph, Mary, and little Jesus had to flee to Egypt because King Herod would otherwise have killed the baby.

How completely different it was with baby Tobi! Weeks before his birth, a beautiful, softly padded, warm cradle was prepared for him. Pretty jackets, rompers, hats, socks, and much more were in the closet waiting for the baby's arrival. Tobias was born in a warm and loving environment. The parents said it had been the same when Nicholas and Laura were born.

Joseph and Mary would have wished to make similar preparations for the baby Jesus, if they had been able. But God's plan was different. Jesus Christ, the King of kings, came from the glory of heaven to this cold, hostile earth to redeem people from their sins. There was no other way—Jesus was born poor and later died on the cross. He knew everything that lay ahead of Him in advance. But He took on this suffering voluntarily and out of pure love. Anyone who lets Him into their heart can understand the true meaning of Christmas.

Does Jesus also live in your heart? Do you thank Him for coming to earth for you? ■



Be Ready

Jesus Christ came into this world as a small child to save mankind. At that time, poor shepherds tended their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem. The night was very dark when suddenly it became very bright because a heavenly light appeared. An angel of God appeared saying that the shepherds should not be afraid because the Savior had been born to them today. Then a host of angels joined him, all praising and honoring God. It was a wonderful moment! And then darkness and silence returned to the field again. But the shepherds believed the message and found the child in the manger.



Once Jesus was an adult, He began to tell people about God and heal many sick people. Some people believed in Jesus and followed Him as His disciples. Unfortunately, many others did not believe in Him. They persecuted Jesus and eventually nailed Him on the cross. But Jesus did not remain dead. He rose from the dead and went to heaven. His reign has no end. And one day, He will return in all His glory—no longer as Savior but as Judge, accompanied by His angels and with the loud sound of God’s trumpet.

No one knows exactly when this will happen, except God. Even the angels don’t know. But what is certain is that every person will be called from this world to eternity one day.

It is up to us to decide here in life where we will spend eternity—in heaven with Jesus or in eternal damnation without God. The Bible says: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he

who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3: 36).

We must be ready for eternity today and wait for the Lord’s return. We can have forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ and be reconciled with God. We want to live every day in obedience to God and serve Him. Jesus says: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12: 26).



Written by
Helene Rotfuss

*„For there is born to you
this day in the city of
David a Savior, who is
Christ the Lord.”
(Luke 2: 11)*





When Christmas

ENTERS YOUR HEART

I grew up in a family where the Word of God was placed in my lap from an early age. I heard all the Bible stories as a child, and attending worship services every week was the expected routine.

During my teenage years, I met friends who slowly but surely increasingly pulled me away from this habit and away from God. I rejected the joy of the Word of God and every beautiful Bible story and plunged into a dark life without God. This time not only separated me from God but also caused my relationship with my family and friends to suffer greatly. I withdrew more and more and didn't want to maintain fellowship or contact with others.

My "new" life didn't make me any happier than before, because inwardly it all left me cold. To forget my sorrow and suffering, I sought more and more joy in the world, but to no avail. I wandered around in the world for a long time until I became increasingly aware of how lost and lonely I was and that this life could not give me any true, lasting inner joy. I knew that the path I was on was not the right one, but I didn't know how I could undo everything. It all seemed so difficult and impossible. Fortunately, I had my family, friends, and a church who were always praying for me.

At Christmastime, I promised my family that I would attend the service with them. We heard a message about true Christmas in the heart when God enters in. I am sure I will never forget that message.

I don't remember how or why, but the next day was full of contention, and everything I had repressed bubbled up.

I clearly remember the scene: I was sitting on the floor, lost and broken inside when God spoke to me. I knew with great clarity that I needed Him *now* and accepted Him into my heart. He forgave me of my debt and lovingly accepted me as His child. I was able to experience a true Christmas.

Since that day, my life instantly changed for the better. I now feel true joy and know that I am no longer alone. I also experience the blessing of fellowship with family and friends again. I particularly count on their support in my walk of faith. But the greatest thing of all is that I can trust in God. I can experience His nearness and help in difficult situations and everyday life.

If you are in a similar position, rest assured: Jesus follows you tirelessly. If we seek Him, He will be found. The moment we return to Jesus and search for Him, He welcomes us like a little lamb and gently

guides us back onto the right path. He alone deserves the honor!

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’” (Luke 15: 4–6).

*Laura Hildenberg
Eppingen, Germany*

BETHLEHEM’S STAR

“**A**nd behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was” (Matthew 2: 9).

Matthew tells us that certain wise men from the East travelled a great distance in search of the new King of the Jews. They followed an unusual star in the sky to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, they learned from King Herod and the religious leaders where the Messiah would be born. Once the wise men received this information, the star realigned itself to lead them to Jesus in Bethlehem. God used the star and His word as a combined compass to lead the searching hearts to their King.

In some ways, God still uses this combination to lead searching hearts to Him. All those who have salvation and live for Jesus are called to be stars in His kingdom. Jesus says in Matthew 5: 16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” When I think back on my life, I can certainly recall the men and women who shone as lights in my past to lead me to Jesus.

I found the Church of God in Aylmer through my siblings who had already started coming to the services regularly. I was invited to the Christmas Eve service in 2004, which I attended. Thereafter, I began to attend services on a semi-regular basis and to read God’s Word at home. I found the Lord at the Flint Convention (Michigan) in 2005 at the age of 16, after an evangelistic service led by Brother Elke. My siblings, the Aylmer church family, and those who served with the Word became Bethlehem stars in my life who used their light and God’s Word to lead me to Jesus.

Who were the Bethlehem stars in your life that God used to bring you to Jesus? Surely every Christian can think of someone. And what about you? Doesn’t God want to use you to shine as a bright star so that others can find their way to the King of Kings?

*David Knelsen
Hamilton, Ontario*



Reflecting on Christmas

Hard to believe, but the Advent season is upon us. Does the Christmas season still bring us joy? Many of us have celebrated multiple Christmases. Looking back, the many memories associated with Christmas come to mind. The childhood memories are especially endearing and still bring a smile today. We were so excited about Christmas. Our parents called it joyful anticipation. It was thrilling

when the Christmas tree was set up, lighting up the entire room with its twinkling lights. Under the tree lay beautifully wrapped gifts—our gifts. The big question was whether our wishes would come true.

While external trappings played a role, there was always a focus to not lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas. The Christmas services, along with the Sunday school program, highlighted the true spirit of

Christmas: the birth of the Savior. We heard, “God became man.” In our home, it was a tradition to read the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke and kneel in prayer before unwrapping our gifts. As a young child, these thoughts were hard to comprehend. How could this be possible? The Creator coming down from His world into our world, the world of humans. God’s Son came to our Earth. One of the first Bible verses we memorized as children was John 3:16: “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.” God gave His Son. This is the essence of Christmas.

But we only truly understand this when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and guilt, showing us that we are lost. He makes us aware of our sins against God. Suddenly, we realize we are separated from God. Our sins stand like a wall between us and God. The Bible describes such people as “spiritually dead.” Paul clearly summarizes this in his letter to the Romans, speaking of the lost state of humanity while also offering the solution: “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

And that’s where Christmas comes in. God set out to help us; He took the first step toward humanity. John describes it this way: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Our thoughts hasten to Bethlehem. There we find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, just like any other baby. And yet, unlike any other baby. It is the Son of God, born of a virgin. This truth allowed Him to be called “holy, innocent, undefiled” (Hebrews 7:26). As the Innocent, He came to bear our guilt and atone for our sins. About 700 years before this event, the prophet Isaiah vividly spoke of it: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes, we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4–5). When we compile these thoughts, we understand that Bethlehem was merely the birthplace of Jesus; the goal was Calvary, where He was “wounded for our transgressions.”

In Galatians 4:4, we read: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son.” Paul makes it clear that everything unfolded precisely according to God’s timing and plan, fulfilling many Old

Testament promises. For instance, Joseph, with the obviously pregnant Mary, had to travel to Bethlehem, as it was foretold (Micah 5:1) that Jesus would be born there. God used a census that required Joseph to go to his hometown, bringing them to Bethlehem. And there, the Savior of all people (1 Timothy 4:10) was born.

The evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—add to the narrative through their accounts, guiding us to the scene at Golgotha, where He was crucified. The Innocent died for the guilty. He bore their punishment and death and paved the way back to God. He died in our place. For us. For me. In John 19:30, Jesus speaks His last words: “It is finished!”—these three words say it all. God’s plan was fulfilled.

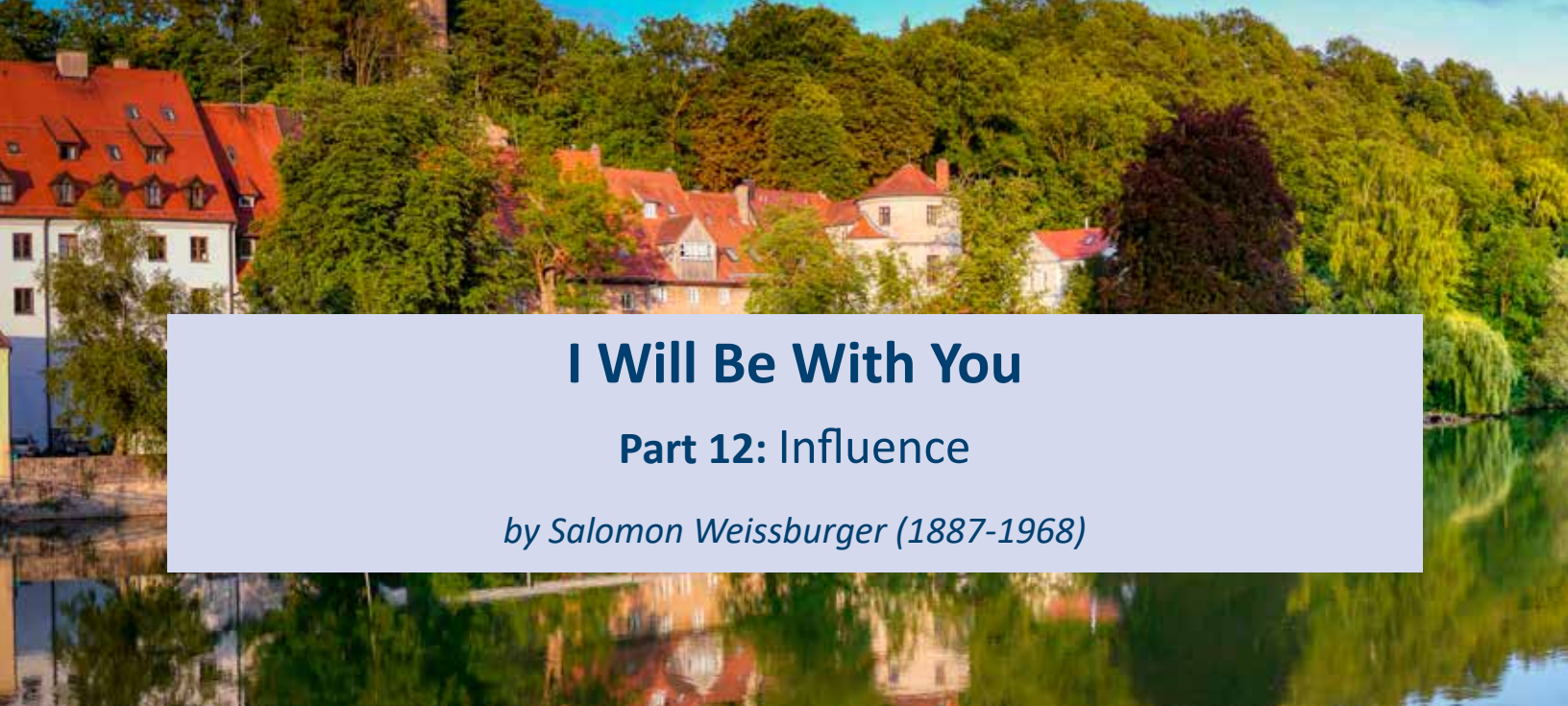
Resting on the promises of the Old Testament, their fulfillments were initiated through the Christmas story. Announced and promised thousands of years earlier, people waited a long time for the Messiah. And then the time came. In Matthew, 1:18 it states: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows . . .” and goes into detail about how it all came to pass. Difficulties had to be overcome, and obstacles had to be removed. Yet above it all, the angel’s triumphant words rang true: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

Christmas—Jesus came into the world. In this Light, the gifts and strings of lights become unimportant. They fade away. It becomes clear to me how most people miss the true meaning of Christmas. The trivial becomes paramount, and the essential becomes trivial. I want to truly celebrate Christmas. I want to rejoice like a child. I want to let the angels’ message, addressed to the shepherds, deeply affect me. They apply to me as well. “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.’ . . . ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’” (Luke 2:10–14).

Contemplate the lyrics of a German Christmas carol: “With the shepherds I will hasten, to behold my precious Savior.” That is my desire as well; I want my Savior to be the focus of this Christmas season. Then it will truly be Christmas.

Have a blessed Christmas.

*Harry Semenuk
Wetaskiwin, Alberta*



I Will Be With You

Part 12: Influence

by Salomon Weissburger (1887-1968)

Jesus once used baking as a metaphor for the power of influence, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (Matthew 13:33). Even the most active, vigorously bubbling leaven, or sourdough, works away in silence. The same could be said about children of God: the loud flow of many words is not necessarily a sign of spiritual activity.

The stars and their activity paint a similar picture: billions of celestial bodies moving along their tracks in silence. Creation offers other powerful statements as well. A tree’s branches grow heavy with its fruits, in silence, and the human body ticks along, in silence, with only diseased organs breaking the peace. However, there is one exception to this rule: the tongue, a small organ God enabled to speak. Taken together, these examples give us a clear indication that spiritual influence has nothing to do with speaking many words. In 1 Peter 3:1, we read, “Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives.”

Is a quiet, meek spirit not a stronger sermon than many words? Exemplary conduct within our marriages and families, as well as in public and when dealing with difficult people, is still pleasing to God. It also has a stronger impact than just talking eloquently and often about God’s Word; that is not what spiritual influence means.


I have long thought that something is wrong with Christianity today. Every Sunday, hundreds of thousands of preachers stand before their congregations and deliver their sermons, often very good ones at that. But what is the result? The result is mostly words—an inactive sourdough. If every child of God could exert the influence to win only one soul for Christ every year, the whole world would be converted in just over 30 years.

When I first realized this, years ago, I asked God to help me be like sourdough. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we succeed in this, and we need daily times of quietness (Isaiah 30:15) to keep up our strength.

Look to the Lord

Right at the beginning of my spiritual journey, shortly after my conversion, the Lord showed me deep truths: to take offence at nothing and no one, to let nobody influence me, and to let nothing stop me. That is why my wish was to be all right with God, regardless of everyone else.

This attitude carried me through several years and was of great help to me. Over time, however, I noticed a shift as I began to look up to the people who were a blessing to me and whom God seemed to use in a special way. This continued until the Lord led me back to my senses. The key events concerned two people I had looked up to but who later went astray. That left me in great spiritual distress, lasting about 14 days, before I



***“Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will declare what He has done for my soul.”
(Psalm 66: 16)***

relearned to look away from people and rely only on God. When I did so, something wonderful happened: I became deeply rooted and secure in the Lord. Those experiences are a great blessing to me to this day.

In my work for the Lord, I visited many places, getting to know different people, communities, and countries. I saw a lot of good things, and a lot of bad things, but through it all, it was a blessing to me that I looked more to the Lord than to people. Anyone who does so will experience as the psalmist wrote: “A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; *but* it shall not come near you” (Psalm 91:7). We, too, will be able to say, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘*He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust*’” (Psalm 91: 1–2).

No one and nothing can be allowed to come between us and the Lord. The Lord wants to take the first place at all times—and He is worth it. If we give Him the first place in our lives, then we will be able to take the right position toward others through Him as well. First the Lord, then everything else: husbands, wives, children, earthly things, and also our sisters and brothers in the Lord. “But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not mis-

using *it*. For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:29–31).

Many things are not sinful in themselves, but if we love them more than God, they become our sin. When we put them in first place, that is idolatry. Scripture says, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). It is good to love our pastors, but even they are only guides to the Lord. For our part, as pastors, we should endeavor not to draw people to us but to Jesus. If we break this rule, we put ourselves in God’s place. How common both these failings are among congregations and pastors is obvious enough if you just look around.

1929 to 1933 were very troubled years in Germany as civil war, poverty, and unemployment ran rampant. Our brothers and sisters, including preachers, also suffered greatly from these circumstances, yet it was a good time for spiritual development. Times of need cause people to seek God more than do good days. At that time, I was responsible for the congregation of Essen. When enquiring to see who among the brothers was still able to earn a living, I realized that, even out of work and with low incomes, they were still supporting the work of the Lord financially. In light of these circumstances, I asked the community to pay me only as much as I would have received in unemployment benefits because I could not tolerate living in better conditions than my unemployed sisters and brothers. Out of those low wages, I still gave tithes as well. ■

Simon, the Zealot

Text: Luke 6: 15

Simon the Zealot is the next apostle mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. The Contemporary English Version (CEV) does not say Simon the Zealot but “Simon, known as the Eager One.” In Matthew 10: 4, he is called “Simon the Canaanite.” A commentator writes the following: “The name suffix here does not refer to the land of Canaan or the city of Cana but is derived from the Hebrew root word ‘quanna’ and means to be zealous.”

If Simon had this suffix to his name, then he probably had a hot-tempered and eager character. He was likely very temperamental, and this explains his past to some extent. Before following Jesus, he probably belonged to the Zealot party, which is why he was called “the Zealot.”

The Zealot party was a very extreme, violent, and feared political sect. Only people with a temperamental, zealous, and strong nature could belong to this party. A soft-hearted person would not have endured there. We can therefore assume that Simon had such a character.

The Zealots

At the time of Jesus, there were four Jewish groups:

- **The Pharisees**, who had dedicated themselves to the conscientious observance of the Jewish religion.

- **The Sadducees**, who were characterized by strict adherence to the Mosaic Law but who rejected the concept of resurrection and the existence of spirits.
- **The Essenes**, who are not mentioned in the Bible but were there nonetheless. They lived in the desert, away from all other people, and dedicated their lives to studying the law.
- **The Zealots**, who primarily had a political orientation. They hated the Romans, and their goal was to overthrow the Roman occupation. They could not wage open warfare (they were too few for that) and therefore specialized in underhanded acts of violence.

The Zealots were extremists in every respect. Like the Pharisees, they interpreted the law literally. They were also prepared to use violence. They believed that only God had the right to rule over Jews. They therefore believed that they were doing God’s work when they simply murdered Roman soldiers, political leaders, and anyone who opposed them. They hoped for a Messiah who would lead them in overthrowing the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel. They were prepared to die for their beliefs



at any time, whatever the manner of death. They had a burning passion for their cause that no one and nothing could extinguish, not even death and torture.

The Zealots concentrated on targeted terrorist attacks. They formed a group of secret assassins—Sicarii (“dagger men”). These carried curved blades in the folds of their robes. They crept up behind the Romans and political leaders and stabbed them in the back, through the ribs, and into the heart.

So they waged war against the Romans. Nothing could stop them; they were passionate and fanatical. “Zelotes” is a Greek word for “zealous enthusiasm.” Josephus writes that the name “Zealots” is a misnomer: “as if they had been zealous in good deeds and not in bad ones—instead they surpassed all others in their evil deeds.”

The call of love

Simon the Zealot used to be one of these people. We do not know how far and how deeply he was involved in this sect, but he certainly had a zealous, courageous, and determined character. Unfortunately, it is also unclear how he came to Jesus. Perhaps he followed Jesus at the beginning because he hoped for an earthly kingdom that Jesus would establish. But the fact that Jesus called him to be His apostle at a certain point in time

testifies to a complete change of heart. He gave up the extreme party of the Zealots and followed the call of love.

He now devoted his zeal, courage, determination, and passion to Jesus Christ and His work. He followed Him and was now able to accept and love Matthew, the tax collector. In the past he might have killed him, but through Jesus’ grace they became spiritual brothers and worked side by side—no longer as a tax collector and a Zealot, but filled with the Holy Spirit for the spread of the gospel.

Only the grace and power of God can bring about such a change. Whoever you are, whatever your past, you too can be saved by the grace of God. Maybe you have a criminal past; maybe you are bound by drugs and alcohol or by pornography and sinful passion. Satan holds you captive with mighty chains.

But today, Jesus is coming, and you are hearing the call of God’s infinite love. He has the power to redeem you completely and break every chain. Give Him your heart today and ask Him to move in with you and give you new life through the Holy Spirit. Like Simon, you are called to a new and eternal life with God!

Eduard Albrecht, Eppingen (DE)



At the Turn of the Year

*The Lord hath brought me hitherto
By His surpassing favor;
His mercies ev'ry morn were new,
His kindness did not waver.
God hitherto hath been my Guide,
Hath pleasures hitherto supplied,
And hitherto hath helped me.*

This beautiful song was written by Aemilie Juliane, the countess of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, born in 1637.

All these centuries later, we too should join in this song of praise if our lives are rooted in Jesus Christ. It was God who led us thus far, caring for us, protecting us, and giving us victory against Satan's attacks. He alone deserves the honor! Only once we fully recognize God's glory and His love through Christ Jesus can we become truly grateful people.

Gratitude is something we learn and in which we can grow, for instance, by walking daily in the ways of God. In a world filled with unrest, conflict, and war, the future may seem dark at times. Nonetheless, we can face it with confidence, resting in His wonderful promise, "I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Even with storm clouds looming, we can be assured that Jesus, our Redeemer, is with us. If we follow Him faithfully, victory will be ours.

If you, dear Reader, are not yet following the Savior, take this opportunity and accept the living Son of God. Let Him enlighten you so that you can become a light for others. Make good use of the time given to you, for our lives pass faster than we think, just as this year has gone by in the blink of an eye. "Seek the LORD while He may be found."

The prophet Jeremiah employed an apt metaphor: "Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD" (Jeremiah 8:7). The birds follow the instincts God gave them, gathering in flocks and flying south in autumn

before returning in spring. But how about us? Many people refuse to listen to God's voice. God speaks to each individual, and not just once; His Word says that He calls everyone, two or three times, to be saved from sin. Unfortunately, many people repress and ignore this call.

Perhaps God is speaking to you right now. Think of the birds: they know their time and heed God's call to arrive safely at their destination. Learn from them and listen to God's voice. He will save you. God calls to all, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Hebrews 3:15). We live in the end times. All true children of God are becoming more and more aware of this. How long before the door of grace is closed?

We do not know what the new year will bring, but we do not need to know. What we need to know is whether we are ready to meet our Lord and Master when He returns. Even if we are already saved, there is a question we need to ask ourselves: Do we have oil in our lamps, or are we like Matthew 25's "foolish virgins" who missed the wedding feast because their lamps went out? We can each only answer for ourselves. Therefore, "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16). ■





Dear Reader,

*“Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 106: 1).*

*We are wholeheartedly grateful to God for His grace, goodness, and faithfulness,
which have also guided us through the past year 2024.*

*When many things are changing, technology is advancing and morals are
increasingly crumbling, wars are taking their toll, and people are looking
fearfully into the future, the eternal God remains an unshakeable rock. His
Word is eternal truth; His love sustains and strengthens His children.*

*We are grateful for the many prayers and encouragement we have received from
our readers. May God reward each and every one of them. It is our goal that
through this work the bright light of the Gospel will illuminate many hearts and
that God’s children will be strengthened and encouraged.*

*Wouldn’t you like to help spread the word about the Foundation of Faith?
Perhaps you know people around you who would like to read it. Why don’t you
invite them to become a reader of the Foundation of Faith for free?*

*We wish all our readers a Christmas richly blessed by God. May our heavenly
Father continue to guide, strengthen, and edify you in the new year.*

The Editors

The Good News

*Praise the Lord, oh all ye people;
Jesus came to save from sin.
Praise the Lord, both great and feeble;
You can have God's peace within!
Unto us a Child is given,
The Son of God whom we adore.
God created earth and heaven,
Yet He planned this all before.*

*The Savior came for all the nations
Offering sinners His great love.
Cleansing, He imparts salvation,
Sending blessings from above.
See His great humiliation;
For mankind He lived and died.
He reigns, Lord of Creation,
In His glory now on high!*

*Oh, believe and live, ye sinners;
For us Jesus paid the cost.
We, who once were lost, are winners;
Jesus died upon the cross.
Spread this news throughout the nations;
God sent His Son from heaven.
He was born for our salvation;
Through grace we are forgiven!*

*A star of light that's shining bright
Guides the wise upon their way.
The darkness flees now with the night;
O day of joy, o happy day!
The light now shines within our hearts
And shows the way how to live right.
God's peace within this Child imparts,
Full salvation shining bright!*

*Once again this Christmas season
We proclaim the birth of Christ.
His love for us is the reason
That we can live now in His light.
Troubled soul, do not be weary;
Fear not, rejoice, believe in Him.
There's good reason to be cheery:
He gives victory over sin!*