
Shield of Faith

A Primitive Baptist Publication

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God With Us

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

In about 735 BC Ahaz was king of Judah. The kingdom of Israel was already tributary to Assyria. The king of Israel and the king of Syria formed an alliance to organize a resistance against Assyria, and to force Ahaz to cooperate in their plans against Assyria. In the event of Ahaz' refusal, they planned to depose him, and to set one of their own choice upon the throne of David. They waged war against Judah, advancing as far as Jerusalem itself, but without complete success (Isaiah 7:1). Ahaz, a weak king, and now panic-stricken, determined to invoke the aid of the king of Assyria (II Kings 16:7). Such a course would involve the loss of national independence and the payment of a heavy tribute.

At this period of crisis, Isaiah is told to deliver a message to the king. Ahaz, was depending neither upon the help of God nor upon the courage of his people, but upon Assyria. Isaiah, in an effort to prevent the fatal alliance with Assyria, offers him a sign. Fearing to commit himself to Divine dependence, but with a pretense at religious scruples, "Neither will I tempt the LORD," the king refused (Isaiah 7:12). The prophet then reproached him bitterly for his lack of faith, which, he says, not only wearies men, but God also (Isaiah 7:13).

Isaiah then proceeded to give him a sign from God Himself, the sign of "Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Immanuel is compound Hebrew word or name, signifying *God with us*. The name is expressive of the union of the two natures, human and divine.

This scripture is applied by the angel of the Lord to Jesus. "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not

to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:20-23).

He is God with us — that One who dwelt amongst us, and, as one writer has said, "He could say, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' They who walked with him and watched his life, and who understood and appreciated him, recognized the spirit, the character, the life, of God himself. In his mind were the *thoughts*, in his words the *truth*, in his deeds the *principles*, in his death the *love*, in his mission the *purpose*, of God."

He was at once Man and God: born of the earth, earthy; born of heaven, heavenly and Divine. The Creator became a creature; the Lord of heaven and earth came in the form of a servant.

If God is *with his creatures*, it can only be to bless and save them, to deliver them from evil, to bring them into full unity with himself, to establish them in all good. If God, who is love, is *with his sinful, rebellious, self-willed children*, it can only be to recover them from their sinfulness.

The word *Immanuel* is not so much to relate the name by which Christ would commonly be called, as to describe his nature and office. We find in Scripture many such descriptions. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The name which unites all the offices and titles together is *Jesus*. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their

sins" (Matthew 1:21). His full name, then, is *Immanuel-Jehoshua* — "God with us, saving us from our sins."

John speaks of our Immanuel in this manner, "And the Word was made 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, emphasis added). Grace can have no greater expression than in the Holy God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), in order to die for unworthy sinners. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

We cannot begin to grasp the immensity of blessings and benefits we have in *Immanuel, God with us*. The Apostle Paul said, "He that spared not 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). We find great assurance in the words of the writer of Hebrews, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

While we find many great assurances in God's word, are we not, as Gideon of old, prone to ask "... Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judges 6:13). In the weakness of our humanity, do we not at times question, "Is God really with us?"

While we hold on to the assurance of God's word, most of us have experienced times when we have felt forsaken by God. The psalmist Asaph, in deep distress asked, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his

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God With Us

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mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah” (Psalms 77:7-9). The psalm then changes from the spirit of despondency to that of hope. The psalmist consoles himself by remembering the goodness of God to himself and others of his people in times gone by.

The psalmist realized that his doubts of God's faithfulness proceed from the weakness of his faith. “I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Psalms 77:11). His antidote for doubt was to think of God's blessing His people in ages past. He could then say with David, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalms 37:25)

There are times when our distress is designed by God to strengthen and to purify us. Job certainly felt to be forsaken of God for a time, but even in his suffering, he trusted God. “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:8-10). Ultimately, Job's experience would lead to a greater revelation of God. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5).

I suspect that more often when we fail to experience “God with us,” it is a result of our straying from Him. “Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

In the days of the Judges, “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites,” (Judges 6:6), and cried out to the Lord. God's messenger was sent to Gideon. “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up

from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:12-13). Gideon found no comfort in the stories he had heard of past miracles, for he felt that “now the LORD hath forsaken us.” The reason for their condition was very evident. “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years” (Judges 6:1). Gideon's father kept an altar of Baal, probably for public worship, as well a grove, likely dedicated to Ash-taroath, the female counterpart of Baal.

“And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down” (Judges 6:25-26).

Joash, Gideon's father, seems to have been a worshipper of Baal, but his views may have been changed by what Gideon had said and done. Joash understood that if Baal were the true God, he would avenge his own injured honor. His argument was, if Baal was indeed a god he could take care of himself, and if he was not a god, then those who plead for him deserve to die for setting up false deities.

Idolatry so blinds men, and renders them so foolish, that they will worship gods that have no power to help themselves. Gideon was instrumental in opening the eyes of his father to the foolishness of idolatry. Gideon eventually believed the message of the angel, “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour” (Judges 6:12). He was also obedient to the command of the Lord, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14). Gideon had just been told that Jehovah was with him; and he is now commanded “Go in THIS thy might, that is, in the might of Jehovah, who is with him. Going in the might of God, Gideon was victorious over the enemies of his people. “Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon” (Judges

8:28).

Each year at Christmas time, most believers hear of “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). However, few of us probably realize the implications of “God with us.” Moses and Aaron said to Israel, “Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not” (Numbers 14:9), yet Israel feared the inhabitants of the promised land. Angels have announced the God is with us, yet we fear to take hold of the spiritual blessings God has promised us.

The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Rome said, “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Christ coming as a babe proves that God is for us, yet we too often give in to those who are against us.

To the church at Philippi Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13), yet “I can't” is all too often on the lips of the church. Jesus said, “...for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). We have too often proved the truth of His words by trying to serve in our strength instead of in His mighty power.

To the shepherds keeping their flocks, the angel of the Lord appeared. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). That message should thrill us just as much as it did those shepherds. It should be to us “good tidings of great joy.” God is with us as our Saviour, as Christ, our Lord.

Thanks

I appreciate very much each one who has supported this paper with financial gifts, prayers, and words of encouragement. Our funds usually seem as the widow's “handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse,” (I Kings 17:12), only enough for immediate needs. Yet “...the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail” (verse 17). Without your support and encouragement, this work could not go on. Thank you very much.

Elder Greg Phillips, Editor

Bible Quiz

Each of the following places meant something special in Jesus' life. Match the place with what happened there.

1. Bethlehem, Matthew 2:1
 2. Nazareth, Matthew 2:23
 3. Jerusalem, Luke 2:42
 4. Jordan River, Matthew 3:13
 5. Sea of Galilee, Luke 8:23-25
 6. Calvary, Luke 23:33
 7. Capernaum, Matthew 4:13
 8. Gethsemane, Mark 14:32
 9. Cana, John 2:1
 10. Bethesda, John 5:2-9
 11. Bethany, Luke 24:50-51
- a. Attended a wedding; first miracle
 - b. Ascended from here
 - c. Center of ministry
 - d. Stilled a storm
 - e. Celebrated Passover at age twelve
 - f. Birthplace
 - g. Home
 - h. Baptized
 - i. Crucified
 - j. Prayed
 - k. Healed a man

Answers on page 4.

Gathering of Saints

Twice each year the Primitive Baptist Ministers and Deacons Association sponsors a *Gathering of Saints*. These meetings are intended to promote unity and fellowship among the people of God. The meetings are not for ministers and deacons only, but for all who desire to worship the Lord.

The next meeting is planned for February 29-March 1, 2008, at the Ozark Primitive Baptist Church of Ozark, Alabama. For more information, contact Ozark pastor, Elder Dennis Holt at (334) 445-1187, or Ministers and Deacons Association chairman, Elder Greg Phillips at (423) 8975-3652.

NOISE

Scientists report that noise has a definite effect on our working efficiency. Noise increases the pulse, quickens the blood pressure, and upsets the normal rhythm of the heart. Spiritual noise has just as bad an effect on spiritual life. The man who is occupied with the things that keep him from hearing the voice of God in his heart is spiritually frustrated. It is impossible for those who are spiritually noisy to have true peace of mind, peace of heart, and peace of soul! This is why God has said, "Be still, and know that I am God ..." (PSALMS 46:10).

The Word Was With God

Christ, then, is the One who has made the incomprehensible God intelligible. The force of this title of His found in John 1:1, may be discovered by comparing it with that name which is given to the Holy Scriptures — "the Word of God." What are the Scriptures? They are the Word of God. And what does that mean? This: the Scriptures reveal God's mind, express His will, make known His perfections, and lay bare His heart. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus has done for the Father. But let us enter a little more into detail: —

(a) A "word" is a *medium of manifestation*. I have in my mind a thought, but others know not its nature. But the moment I clothe that thought in words it becomes cognizable. Words, then, make objective unseen thoughts. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus has done. As the Word, Christ has made manifest the invisible God.

(b) A "word" is a *means of communication*. By means of words I transmit information to others. By words I express myself, make known my will, and impart knowledge. So Christ, as the Word, is the Divine Transmitter, communicating to us the life and love of God.

(c) A "word" is a *method of revelation*. By his words a speaker exhibits both his intellectual caliber and his moral character. By our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned. And Christ, as the Word, reveals the attributes and perfections of God. How *fully* has Christ revealed God! He displayed His power, He manifested His wisdom, He exhibited His holiness, He made known His grace, He unveiled His heart.

In Christ, and nowhere else, is God fully and finally told out.

"*And the word was WITH GOD.*" This preposition "with" seems to suggest two thoughts. First, the Word was in the presence of God. As we read, "Enoch walked *with* God," that is, he lived in fellowship with God. There is a beautiful verse in Proverbs 8 which throws its light on the meaning of "with" in John 1:1, and reveals the blessed relation which obtained from all eternity between the Word and God. The passage begins at

Proverbs 8:22 where "wisdom" is personified. It tells us of the happy fellowship which existed between the Word and God before ever the world was. In Proverbs 8:30 we read, "Then I was *by him*, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

In addition to the two thoughts just suggested, we may add that the Greek preposition "pros" here translated "with" is sometimes rendered "toward," but most frequently "unto." The Word was toward or unto God. One has significantly said, "The word rendered with denotes a perpetual tendency, as it were, of the Son to the Father, in unity of essence."

That it is here said "the word was with God" tells of His *separate personality*: He was not "in" God, but "with" God. Now, mark here the marvelous accuracy of Scripture. It is not said, "the word was with the Father" as we might have expected, but "the word was with God." The name "God" is common to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas "the Father" is the special title of the first Person only. Had it said "the word was with the Father," the Holy Spirit had been excluded; but "with God" takes in the Word dwelling in eternal fellowship with both the Father and the Spirit.

A. W. Pink in *Exposition of the Gospel of John*

Christ A Refuge From The Tempest

By Edward Griffin 1770-1837

And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place) as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.—Isaiah 32:2

This prediction, which was uttered in the days of Ahaz, is thought to have had primary reference to Hezekiah, and to the relief from wicked magistrates which would be experienced in his reign. But in the opinion of the best commentators it had ultimate reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the person of our Redeemer, who is very man as well as God, it is fulfilled that "a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

In a serene day when no wind is up, when no rain is falling, a man may see by the way-side a shelving rock and may pass by it without emotion. Not so the weary traveler who is fleeing before the rising storm or the beating tempest. In a season of rain or in a land of waters, one may pass by a river with little interest. Not so a traveler in the Arabian deserts, surrounded with burning sands, fainting with heat and parched with thirst. The sight of a stream of water, and especially of "rivers of water," in such a place, would transport him. In a country covered with wood or pinched with cold, a huge rock might offer its shade unwelcome; but amidst the parched wastes of Arabia, where the weary traveler, exposed all day to the intense heat of a vertical sun, sees not a tree nor a shrub, but only one boundless waste of burning sand,—there a cool retreat beneath the shade of an overhanging cliff,—there "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," would be most welcome.

These observations suggest a principal reason why the Saviour of the world, whose very name ought to be music to every human ear, is treated with such cruel indifference by the greater part of mankind. It is because they do not feel their guilt and misery and need of a Saviour. They are blind to the infinite majesty and holiness and loveliness of God, and to the immense obligations by which they are bound to him; and therefore they do not see the infinite guilt of rebelling against all his commands, all his mercies, all his glories and interests; and therefore they are not pressed down under a sense of their awful condem-

nation and ruin. Hell is not laid open before them as their proper punishment. They do not stand amazed at the patience which has kept them out of it so long. They do not see themselves to be utterly ruined, and utterly helpless and hopeless without a Saviour. And therefore his precious Gospel, which ought to fill the world with wonder and delight, with gratitude and praise, is cast aside as an idle tale, and the name of Jesus is treated with the most dreadful indifference.

But let a man be thoroughly convicted of sin; let him see himself covered with pollution from the head to the foot; let him stand in sight of the eternal judgment, and apprehend that divine justice has no choice but to crush him into everlasting torment; let him see himself just about to receive the descending wrath of God with the weight of a thousand worlds—in that awful moment let him obtain a glimpse of Jesus, who came to "save his people from their sins;" let him lift his trembling eye to a God reconciled in Christ and smiling upon him—I ask that man, "What now think you of Christ?" O, says he,—but language fails. A sacred reverence settles upon his countenance; his uplifted eye speaks unutterable things. I see it glisten,—I see it weep. O, says he.—His hands are clinched and forcibly raised to his breast. The opening of the last judgment could not add solemnity to a single feature. O the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of Christ! Where has this glorious mystery lain hid that I have never seen it before? To such an eye how precious does the Saviour appear as the great medium through which the love of God has come down to men, as the Word by which all the wonders of the eternal Mind are expressed, as the great Prophet who has brought down all the instructions that have blessed the world from the days of Eden, as the Priest whose atonement and intercession have astonished heaven and earth, as the King who has governed the world from the beginning, and has always protected and provided for his people, and has all their interests in his hands, and all the treasures of the universe to impart. To one who is indifferent to the blessedness of communion with God and of conformity to him, there

appears no form or comeliness in Christ why he should desire him. But to one who feels an insatiable eagerness to rise from this dark world to a knowledge of all the grand and interesting things which are taking place in the kingdom of God,—who longs to be united to all holy beings, and to share in their immortal friendship and blessedness and honors,—who has no desire so great as to be good and conformed to the God he loves; to such a one Jesus must appear exceedingly precious as the one appointed to open the universe to view, to pour all its light upon the eye, and to exalt the soul to all its purity, to all its dignity, to all its happiness.

To an anxious and afflicted soul the Saviour appears peculiarly interesting in the light in which he is exhibited in the text. In the charming simplicity of eastern figure, he is presented "as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Here are three separate figures, very striking to an eastern ear, which admit of distinct illustrations.

"A hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." This is but one figure—for the latter clause, as is common in eastern poetry, is only the echo of the former—presenting a hiding place and covert from the windy storm and tempest. Jesus is found to be the best hiding place and covert from the winds and tempests of affliction. A poor disconsolate soul, after it has been chased through the world by the frowns of pursuing fortune,—after it has been hunted from place to place, and not suffered to rest in any corner of creation,—will find in Christ that protection and repose which all other places denied it. The weather-beaten wretch, after bearing the storms of this inclement world through the long night of affliction, may find in him a shelter under which he may hear the tempest howl without, and feel it not.

Jesus is the best hiding place and covert from the tempest of an agitated conscience. When the lightning of conviction flashes upon the soul, and guilt with its thundering voice spreads its dark folds over the mind, no where but in Jesus can be found a covert from the bursting storm.

To what other refuge can a sinner fly when the horrid nature of his rebellion is laid open before him? At what time his ingratitude to the God that made, redeemed

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Answers to Bible Quiz

1-f; 2-g; 3-e; 4-h; 5-d; 6-i; 7-c; 8-j; 9a; 10-k; 11-b

Devotions:

Daily Devotion

By Elder Bill Taylor

Workday Grace - December 3, 2007

Fruit of the Righteous

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." Proverbs 11:30

In previous verses in this chapter of the Proverbs, we are told, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" and, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." It seems obvious that whatever is under consideration is meant to be spread abroad, given out freely. When we consider the example of scattering, it is not to be done in a haphazard way; rather, the scattering here speaks of sowing seed, as in planting. One of the wonders of growing things is to see one seed yield a multiple increase. When you plant a "seed" of corn, you expect one corn plant to grow; but you expect that one plant to produce many ears of corn, each of which contains numerous "seeds" of corn. To withhold corn - to refrain from planting - when one has corn that could be scattered, is said to be worthy of cursing. That is the case with natural sowing. What about spiritual sowing?

God's born again people are supplied with numerous spiritual seeds, and we are expected to sow them. If you have been given spiritual blessings, what are you supposed to do? We are not to withhold sowing those spiritual blessings so that they will produce more fruit. If God blesses you, why not tell someone else about it? We might say, "well, it's a personal thing between me and God." In one sense that is true, but God blesses us so that we may be a blessing to others. This is not just in a sense of being blessed with natural things. It is meant in that sense, but it is also meant in a spiritual sense. If we withhold sowing spiritual things to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we may be a detriment to the joy of their souls. To share what God is doing for us has great potential for blessing the souls of others, and it is in that instance that we are said to be "winning souls." I know we may avoid that statement sometimes, as people who believe in the sovereign grace of God being effectual to the salvation of His people; but the sense of winning souls spoken of in God's word has nothing to do with winning a soul to gain eternal life. It has everything to do with winning a soul to the joys of eternal life they have already been granted by God's grace. James' Epistle tells us, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). Aren't you glad that God's people have been willing to share their spiritual blessings with you? Do the same - you'll be wise and you'll be blessed.

Today is a good day to scatter our spiritual blessings and sow to gain much fruit.

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Hymns and Hymn Writers

O come, O come, Emmanuel

The well-known hymn, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," has a curious origin. In the ancient Catholic church it was the custom to sing a short sentence which fitted in with the particular Church season or festival immediately before and after the Magnificat. This was called the Antiphon. The Antiphon sung in this way during the season of Advent consisted of only one word, a long drawn out "O !", like a cry of distress, meant to indicate the intense longing of the Church for her Lord's Return. This was called "The Great O of Advent."

After a time, someone added to this single word some of the titles ascribed in Scripture to our Lord, together with a brief prayer, such as "O Emmanuel, come and save us"; "O Key of David, unlock the prison house;" "O Day-spring, come and give us light," etc. One of these was chanted on each of the seven days before Christmas, and the calendar for December in the Prayer Book, is printed on December 16 the words "O *Sapientia*," the Latin for "O Wisdom," the two words with which the first of the Advent Antiphon began, and which were sung on that day.

Later still, some person turned five or more of these Antiphons into a Latin hymn, and finally Dr. Neale translated that hymn into English, his translation finding a place in most hymn-books of today.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!
AMEN.

What is the thought of Christmas?
Giving.
What is the hope of Christmas?
Living.
What is the joy of Christmas?
Love.

No silver or gold is needed for giving,
If the heart is filled with Christmas love,
For the hope of the world is kindly living,
Learned from the joy of God above.

-Laura Hooker.

Christ A Refuge From The Tempest

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and preserves him appears; at what time he is terrified and confounded by the frequent repetition of his sins and the obstinacy of his corruptions; at what time guilt, super-added to guilt, rolls its dark wreaths over the soul, like clouds that "return after the rain," nowhere but in Jesus can he find a refuge from the gathering tempest. The blood of Christ, sprinkling his conscience from dead works, has a wonderful power to relieve from the pangs of conscious guilt. It is the most sovereign balm to a wounded spirit. "Give me Jesus or I die," cries the agonized soul. "None but Christ, none but Christ. Take away that cloud that I may see him, and I shall live." What other refuge can a soul find that is racked with guilt? Let him go to his wealth, his honors, his pleasures; they are all unsavory ashes in the mouth of a man dying with hunger. Let him go to philosophy, it is a stranger to his case, and knows nothing either of his griefs or his wants. Let him go to speculative divinity, it is no physician, but only a corpse laid by the side of a dying man. Let him go to the courts of the Lord,—let him go to his Bible, to his knees, and all without Christ are nothing. Let him go to God, and God out of Christ "is a consuming fire." But let him only come in sight of Jesus, and get near enough to "touch" if it be but "the hem of his garment," and all his pains are instantly relieved,—the fire in his conscience is quenched, and he is as much at ease as though he never felt a pain.

Jesus is also the best covert from the tempest of fear when it agitates the soul. There is a material difference between conscious guilt and the apprehension of punishment, although, like light and heat, they generally go together. I see a sinner convulsed with the fear of a judgment to come. With an eye wildly rolling and marked with horror, I hear him cry, "Who" can dwell with—devouring fire? "Who" can inhabit "everlasting burnings?" His anxious eye looks above and beneath and searches creation through, but not a ray of hope can it find,—nothing but clouds and darkness and tempests. At length it falls on Jesus. Instantly the heavens are calm; the sound of the distant storm dies upon his soothed ear, and every care is still. Jesus is the only hiding-place from the tempest of divine wrath. A rock of adamant he stood, and suffered this storm to

spend its force on him; while his people, enclosed "in him," lay hid from the beating tempest. The storm is past, and now their faith looks abroad and sees an unclouded sky, and all nature smiling in fresher beauties than though no storm had been. To finish the illustration of this figure, Jesus is the only hiding-place from the storms and tempests which forever beat upon the regions of the damned. Not to them is he a covert. They rejected the canopy of his grace when he would willingly have spread it over them; and now he is nothing to them. But to his own dear people, he will forever be a covert from the hail which will eternally lash the howling millions of the damned.

It is time to make a transition to the next figure. "As rivers of water in a dry place." The figure is, that Jesus conveys satisfaction and refreshment to those who can find them nowhere else. There is a thirst for happiness in the soul of man, but there is a drought in all things but in God,—and for human souls, a drought in all things but in the God that shines "in the face of Jesus Christ." Such is the constitution of things, that no man can find satisfaction but in the Christ of God. Nor will any ever find it there but those who despair of finding it any where else. But "when the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them: I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." When one has ranged creation through in search of happiness; has sought it in the field and in the city, in the haunts of business and in the circles of pleasure,—and has met with nothing but disappointment and rebuffs; when he has wandered restless from scene to scene, from employment to employment, perhaps from country to country; when, a pilgrim in the deserts of life, he finds himself "in a dry and thirsty land where no water is," and faints to think that happiness is no where to be found; then the Gospel meets him and thus accosts him—Wherefore seekest thou "the living among the dead?" It is not here. Return from thine idle pursuit. There is but one point whence refreshment can come. Lift thine eyes to the Saviour of sinners. He lifts his eyes; he lifts his heart; and finds "waters breaking out" in the wil-

derness—and streams in the desert." Ah, says he, this is where I should have come before. It would have saved me many sore disappointments and many years of anguish.

When one is plucked and crushed by the hand of adversity,—has found nothing but grief and perplexity in his connexion with the world,—carries the aching wounds where friends that have been torn away once grew to his heart,—mourns alone without father or mother, without brother or sister, without wife or child,—unpitied by the crowd of strangers that gaze upon him and pass him by,—while his tattered garments remind him of better days; I hasten to the turf where he sits weeping, and gently, (lest I should alarm the ear of grief,) say to him, Hath no man pitied thee? Ah, says he, I am "in a dry and thirsty land where no water is;" no satisfaction or refreshment for a wretch crushed beneath misfortune. From my soul I pity you, but do not despair. Let me lead you to the mourner's Friend. I bring him to Jesus: and when I see the balm applied to his wounds, and the countenance of the sufferer beginning to brighten, I bow and take my leave, and return to my house with delicious sensations that an infidel never knew.

Here is another pressed under a sense of heavy guilt. He also is in a land where no water is. He has sought on all sides for relief, but sought in vain. His thirst is for reconciliation with God. In quest of this he has applied to external reformation, to outward duties, to the means of grace. He has sought the counsel of ministers and Christians, and has tried to repose on the good opinions of others. He has made the desperate attempt to rest on universalism, and even on infidelity; but all to no purpose. The fever of his mind remains. His thirst for pardon and peace is unabated; but no where can he find any thing to allay it, till at last he approaches the Gospel. He hears it say, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." His attention is strongly arrested. He examines the passage. It is the voice of the Saviour himself. He ultimately seizes the invitation and goes to him: and his astonished soul finds this way of salvation exactly suited to his wants. He finds within "him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The Epistle of Mathetes

(Lightfoot & Harmer, 1891 translation)

[The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus is probably the earliest example of Christian apologetics, writings defending Christianity from its accusers. The Greek writer and recipient are not otherwise known, but the language and other textual evidence dates the work to the late 2nd century; some assume an even earlier date and count it among the Apostolic Fathers.

Mathetes" is not a proper name; it simply means "a disciple." The writer is a Johanne Christian who does not use the name "Jesus" or the expression the "Christ" but prefers the use of "the Word."

A Diognetus was a tutor of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, who admired him for his freedom from superstition and sound educational advice (Meditations 1.6), but he is not likely to be the recipient, or even the assumed recipient, of this apology. More likely is 'the most excellent Diognetus', Claudius Diogenes, who was procurator of Alexandria at the turn of the second/third centuries.]

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs.

For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life.

Nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma as some are.

But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvellous, and confessedly contradicts expectation.

They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign.

They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring.

They have their meals in common, but not their wives.

They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh.

Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.

They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives.

They love all men, and they are persecuted by all.

They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life.

They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things.

They are dishonoured, and yet they are glorified in their dishonour. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated.

They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect.

Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life.

War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility.

In a word, what the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world.

The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through the divers cities of the world.

The soul hath its abode in the body, and yet it is not of the body. So Christians have their abode in the world, and yet they are not of the world.

The soul which is invisible is guarded in the body which is visible: so Christians are recognised as being in the world, and yet their religion remained invisible.

The flesh hateth the soul and wudgeth war with it, though it receiveth no wrong, because it is forbidden to indulge in pleasures; so the world hateth Christians, though it receiveth no wrong from them, because they set themselves against its pleasures.

The soul loveth the flesh which hateth it, and the members: so Christians love those that hate them.

The soul is enclosed in the body, and yet itself holdeth the body together; so Christians are kept in the world as in a prison-house, and yet they themselves hold the world together.

The soul though itself immortal dwelleth in a mortal tabernacle; so Christians sojourn amidst perishable things, while they look for the imperishability which is in the heavens.

The soul when hardly treated in the matter of meats and drinks is improved; and so Christians when punished increase more and more daily.

So great is the office for which God hath appointed them, and which it is not lawful for them to decline.

For it is no earthly discovery, as I said, which was committed to them, neither do they care to guard so carefully any mortal invention, nor have they entrusted to them the dispensation of human mysteries.

But truly the Almighty Creator of the Universe, the Invisible God Himself from heaven planted among men the truth and the holy teaching which surpasseth the wit of man, and fixed it firmly in their hearts, not as any man might imagine, by sending (to mankind) a subaltern, or angel, or ruler, or one of those that direct the affairs of earth, or one of those who have been entrusted with the dispensations in heaven, but the very Artificer and Creator of the Universe Himself, by Whom He made the heavens, by Whom He enclosed the sea in its proper bounds, Whose mysteries all the elements faithfully observe, from Whom [the sun] hath received even the measure of the courses of the day to keep them, Whom the moon obeys as He bids her shine by night, Whom the stars obey as they follow the course of the moon, by Whom all things are ordered and bounded and placed in subjection, the heavens and the things that are in the heavens, the earth and the things that are in the earth, the sea and the things that are in the sea, fire, air, abyss, the things that are in the heights, the things that are in the depths, the things that are between the two. Him He sent unto them.

Was He sent, think you, as any man might suppose, to establish a sovereignty, to inspire fear and terror?

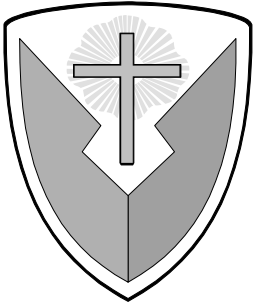
Not so. But in gentleness [and] meekness has He sent Him, as a king might send his son who is a king. He sent Him, as sending God; He sent Him, as [a man] unto men; He sent Him, as Saviour, as using persuasion, not force: for force is no attribute of God.

He sent Him, as summoning, not as persecuting; He sent Him, as loving, not as judging.

For He will send Him in judgment, and who shall endure His presence? ...

[Dost thou not see] them thrown to wild

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And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, Hebrews 10:24

The Epistle To Diognetus

(Continued from page 7)

beasts that so they may deny the Lord, and yet not overcome?

Dost thou not see that the more of them are punished, just so many others abound?

These look not like the works of a man; they are the power of God; they are proofs of His presence.

For what man at all had any knowledge what God was, before He came?

Or dost thou accept the empty and nonsensical statements of those pretentious philosophers: of whom some said that God was fire (they call that God, whereunto they themselves shall go), and others water, and others some other of the elements which were created by God?

And yet if any of these statements is worthy of acceptance, any one other created thing might just as well be made out to be God.

Nay, all this is the quackery and deceit of the magicians; and no man has either seen or recognised Him, but He revealed Himself.

And He revealed (Himself) by faith, whereby alone it is given to see God.

For God, the Master and Creator of the Universe, Who made all things and arranged them in order, was found to be not only friendly to men, but also long-suffering.

And such indeed He was always, and is, and will be, kindly and good and dispassionate and true, and He alone is good.

And having conceived a great and unutterable scheme He communicated it to His Son alone.

For so long as He kept and guarded His wise design as a mystery, He seemed to neglect us and to be careless about us.

But when He revealed it through His beloved Son, and manifested the purpose which He had prepared from the beginning, He gave us all these gifts at once, participation in His benefits, and sight and understanding of (mysteries) which none of us ever would have expected.

Having thus planned everything already in His mind with His Son, He permitted us during the former time to be borne along by disorderly impulses as we desired, led astray by pleasures and lusts, not at all because He took delight in our sins, but because He bore with us, not because He approved of the past season of iniquity, but because He was creating the present season of righteousness, that, being convicted in the past time by our own deeds as unworthy of life, we might now be made deserving by the goodness of God, and having made clear our inability to enter into the kingdom of God of ourselves, might be enabled by the ability of God.

[An excerpt. Full text available upon request.]

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