

Christmas 2016
The Remnant of Israel
to Whom Christ Came

Six months before the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and Joseph, he appeared to the husband of an elderly couple by the name of Zacharias, his wife's name was Elizabeth and she was a relative of Mary, called a 'cousin' in Luke 1:36. Gabriel told Zacharias that they would have a son and that he would be a remarkable servant of God.

Luke 1:13-17

- 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
- 14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
- 15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.
- 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
- 17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. KJV

Zacharias made the same protest at this revelation that Abraham and Sarah had once made. He and Elizabeth were too old, not to mention that she had been barren all of her child-bearing years. The old man questioned the angel a little too much and was given an uncomfortable sign to prove the seriousness of the matter. He was stricken dumb, unable to speak until the child arrived. And, he was instructed as to what to name his son, 'John.'

There was the indication in the words of Gabriel that something big was about to happen. A revival, a mighty moving of the Spirit of God, was coming to Israel and John was to play an enormous role in it. The same spirit and power that had rested upon the famous prophet Elijah was to rest upon him and many Israelites would be converted under his ministry. But it is also suggested that his ministry was to be preparatory for something even more wonderful. Someone, 'the Lord,' was coming after John and John's work would make them 'ready' for Him.

When Gabriel came to Mary, Elizabeth was already six months along in her pregnancy.

Luke 1:26-37

- 26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,
- 27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.
- 28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.
- 29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

- 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.
31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.
32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:
33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.
34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?
35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.
37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. KJV

The inconceivable was about to happen. The Spirit of God was going to overwhelm her and without the participation of any man a child was going to be conceived in her womb, the very child for whom her people had been longing and praying for many years, the Son of David Who is also the Son of God, the Eternal King over the entire 'house of Jacob.'

A testimony to the miracle working power of God was already in play, Mary was told, her aged cousin, who had never been able to have children, was herself pregnant. Mary decided to pay Elizabeth and visit and received yet more surprises.

Luke 1:39-45

- 39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;
40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.
41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:
42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.
45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. KJV

Elizabeth revealed that she was indeed who Luke had described her to be in 1:4,5:

Luke 1:5-6

- 5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. KJV

She was a saintly woman and a part of saintliness is humility. “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should visit me?” The words also demonstrate that Elizabeth knew by the revelation of God that this child Mary was carrying was the Lord Himself. Even her unborn child recognized Him and, in Elizabeth’s words, “leaped for joy.”

Mary’s response is considered one of the most, if not the most, profound utterances ever spoken by a woman in all of history.

Luke 1:46-55

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.
54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. KJV

She first spoke in worship of God, calling Him her ‘Savior.’ Then she spoke of His great works and His holiness in keeping with the style of David and all of the prophets. She affirmed salvation through faith, which she called ‘fear.’ She spoke of both the mercy and the judgment of God, mercy on them that are ‘of low degree,’ ‘hungry,’ and ‘His servants.’ She ended by remembering the promise to Abraham concerning his ‘seed,’ which Paul will reveal to be Jesus Christ.

John was born soon after and when Zacharias declared his name as instructed by the angel, his ability to speak returned and immediately he used his mouth to prophecy concerning his son and the One Whom his son would introduce.

Luke 1:67-79

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,
68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;
70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:
71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;
72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;
73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,
74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

- 76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;
- 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,
- 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
- 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. KJV

Notice that Zacharias began his prophecy with praise to God but also notice that he was looking at this event as redemptive, signifying that he had no confidence in the sacrifices at the temple to gain pardon for those who offered them. Notice also that he, too, connected these events with the ‘oath’ that God had made to Abraham, that sure promise that in him the whole world would be blessed. He considered the blessed ideal to be serving God “without fear, in holiness and righteousness...” His son, he was sure, was going to be a mighty prophet and have the privilege of going “before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways.” A right relationship with God, he was convinced, was in the “knowledge of salvation” by which they would obtain “the remission of their sins.” He was confident of the visit of the “dayspring from on high” who would both “give light” and guidance “into the way of peace.”

It is clear that John’s father was expecting spiritual, not physical deliverance, centered in the gracious provision of God to deliver His people from their sins.

Six months later the Blessed Event occurred, but in a very strange and unusual way.

Luke 2:1-14

- 1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.
- 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)
- 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
- 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)
- 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
- 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
- 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
- 8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
- 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
- 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
- 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
- 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,

- lying in a manger.
- 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
- 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. KJV

Notice again the message, A Savior, the Messiah, the Lord, a message and a blessing 'to all people,' the same ones to be blessed in the promise to Abraham. God is to be glorified and men of 'good will' are to experience 'peace,' not the peace of man with man but the peace of man with God, the work of the Savior, Who, as was told to Joseph, would save His people from their sins, Matt. 1:21.

These shepherds found something to do with their sheep, made their way to Bethlehem, the City of David, found Joseph, Mary, and the child, then returned home praising God.

Eight days later, Joseph and Mary traveled, with the baby, to Jerusalem, to the temple, to be circumcised, to offer an offering for Him according to the Law of Moses, and to register Him in the genealogy of the Jewish people. There they encountered two people who represented a number of people in Israel who were looking for and expecting the Messiah of God.

First, Simeon, a just and devout man upon whom the Holy Spirit rested in a special way. He had been given a revelation that he would not die without having seen 'The Lord's Christ.' It had also been revealed to him just that day that he should be in the temple. He instantly recognized the infant as his Savior and Lord and his heart erupted in worship concerning what he understood of the mission of Jesus.

Luke 2:28-32

- 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. KJV

Notice what he believed concerning Jesus:

He is the Salvation of God,
prepared for all the world to see,
to bring light to the Gentiles and glory to Israel.

There is no question but that he believed salvation to be tied up in this person of Christ and not in the temple itself nor its' sacrifices. Even more than that, he knew that there would be much suffering involved in the life of this Savior.

Luke 2:34-35

- 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. KJV

Next Anna, an 84 year old widow and a prophetess. She was known to be constantly at the temple involved in fasting and prayer. She, too, recognized her Savior and gave praise to God but also spoke of Him to many people in Jerusalem who shared her's and Simeon's expectations concerning Christ.

Luke 2:37-38

- 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.
- 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. KJV

I would like to consider with you for a few minutes that group of people that Luke described here, "them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." When we think of the world into which Jesus was born we tend to think of it as completely surprised by the arrival of the Jewish Messiah, and certainly the non-believing and non-Jewish world was indeed in complete ignorance that such a thing was about to transpire. And our reading of the gospels can lead us to the conclusion that the Jewish religion had been completely taken over by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that all understanding of scripture and religious truth was controlled by those two camps. There has been a continual struggle on the part of those who look back at those times to realize that from the very earliest moments of the national history of the Jews there has always been a believing core in the nation, a group of people who lived by faith, had experienced profound repentance from sin, and were committed to personal holiness, living according to the revealed will of God. They were often called 'the remnant.'

Isa 1:7-9

- 7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.
- 8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.
- 9 **Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant**, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. KJV

Amos 5:14-15

- 14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.
- 15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that **the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph**. KJV

There is a need for us to see, through the eyes of faith, how the culture was structured. There were the Romans who ruled over the land, the Pharisees and Sadducees who ruled the daily affairs of the people as well as the temple and its's daily operations. Then there were the ordinary Israelites who Zacharias, the father of John, described as "them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." They were confused and deceived by the leaders of their religion. But there was also 'the remnant,' a little group of believing Jews and proselytes to whom the basics of the gospel had been revealed.

They knew that the worship system God had given them through Moses could not save them:

First, by the words of the prophets,

Isa 1:10-15

- 10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.
- 11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.
- 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?
- 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.
- 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.
- 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. KJV

Secondly, by the lives and testimonies of those who had lived in captivity while the temple lay in ruins: Daniel, Hananiah, Michael, Azariah, Esther, Mordecai, and others. There was no way to offer sacrifices, but their lives were testimonies of the saving grace of God.

They knew that God demanded repentance and holiness along with faith.

Isa 1:16-18

- 16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;
- 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.
- 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. KJV

They knew that there must be a man who would sacrifice himself in their place, bearing their sins and satisfying the Justice and Wrath of Almighty God.

Isa 53:2-6

- 2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
- 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. KJV

Isa 53:11-12

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. KJV

They knew that He would be born of a virgin.

Isa 7:14

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. KJV

And, that though a man, He would also be Deity.

Isa 9:6-7

6 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.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. KJV

They knew that the matter of sins would be settled within 490 years of the command of Cyrus to rebuild the temple....and they knew that this time was near.

Dan 9:24

24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. KJV

These and many other things were known by the earnest students of God's Word. Even students of religion from far east of them knew of His coming. The remnant clung to these truths, living and abiding in holiness and repentance, awaiting this blessed moment that we reflect upon more particularly this time of year.

There is still a 'remnant' in the world, a tiny subset of those who claim the name 'Christian.' Just as all of the Jews though of themselves as the objects of God's Redemptive Work, so all who are carrying the name of Christ believe that they are safe, loved and redeemed. But it was not all of the Jews that were saved, only that godly remnant, those who were repenting, believing and seeking to be holy. Likewise today there is a small group who are truly serious about the things of God.

It behooves you and I to make sure that we are a part of the remnant who will finally be saved, those who truly believe on the Christ of scripture, not the 'Christ' of this culture, those who have heard His command to repent of sin, take up our crosses and follow Him.

May God grant you eyes to see the true blessings of this day.

It is said that "wise men still seek Him," but now, just like then, wise men and women are few.

On this Christmas Day try to get a glimpse of how blessed you are that the Savior Who Came to Bethlehem's manger has sought you out and granted you the wisdom to seek Him.