



THE STANDARD BEARER

A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will
toward men.*

Luke 2:14

Vol. 68, No. 6
December 15, 1991

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In This Issue ...

"Glory to God" That's the first of the three poetical lines in the song of the angels as it appears on the cover of this special "Christmas Issue." The angels on the hills of Ephratah surely sang out of the thrill they felt, in the depths of their being, over the great wonder of the incarnation of the Son of God. Their shout of glory to God was therefore the response of heaven to the announcement of the herald angel that a Savior was born that day.

What is *our* response? The melody of heaven, after all, as the shepherds were privileged to hear it, should inspire *us* to lift up *our* voices to sing God's praises on *earth*. It was into *our* flesh that Christ came ... and for *our* sakes. If therefore the great mystery of salvation elicited such praise and adoration from the choir of *angels*, how much more ought it to do so from the redeemed among *men*! Is that our experience at "Christmas" time? Or do we find instead that the lustre of the Incarnation is dimmed by a thousand distractions? If so, do we do right by trying still to "sanctify the profane"? What should be our attitude toward the celebration of Christmas? For helpful insights read, in this issue, "The Church's Observance of Christmas" and "Marking the Christmas Season."

"And on earth peace ..." (the second line of that song of the angels). Peace? In a world that is alienated from God and at enmity with Him? Peace for *us*? When we suffer sickness and pain? When we lose loved ones, endure persecution for Christ's sake, have financial problems in the family and conflicts in the church, and have daily to strive with the devil and fight against the lusts of the flesh? Can there be real peace on earth? If so, how can it be the experience of the child of God *personally*? How is it manifest in the *church*? What are the implications of Christmas for *world* peace? In this issue, the theme of which is "peace," you will find these questions explored, respectively, in "Peace Through Our Lord Jesus Christ," "Peace in the Church," and "Christmas and World Peace."

We hope you like the cover, too.

D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Wonder in Bethlehem

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

Luke 2:17, 18

In the dead of night an angel appeared to shepherds outside Bethlehem, as they tended their sheep.

What a tremendous message this angel had for these shepherds! Unto you is born this night in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

This was followed by the appearance of a multitude of angels, praising God.

When the darkness and silence of night returned, the shepherds slipped away to Bethlehem to see the wonder child, whose birth the angels had announced.

Our attention is now drawn to the report that the shepherds spread abroad concerning what they had heard and seen as well as to the reaction of those who heard their report. Those who heard wondered at the sayings of the shepherds.

This wonder was the wonder of unbelief, a wonder which is prevalent even today.

As believers we also wonder at the glorious events reported by the shepherds. But our wonder is of a far different kind.

* * * * *

What astounding news came from the lips of the shepherds.

While the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night, an angel of the Lord came suddenly upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were afraid. For it was a common belief that to be visited by an angel meant death.

But the angel spoke wonderful words to them.

He told them not to be afraid, for he brought glad tidings of great joy to them and to all the people.

What were these glad tidings? Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. No, there could be no doubt about it. That angel had announced to them that the Savior, whom God had promised long ago through the prophets, had just been born.

And the angel told them where to find this newborn babe. They would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

But there was more. For suddenly the heavens were filled with a multitude of heavenly angels, praising God. With angelic words they ascribed honor and glory to God for the birth of the Savior. For the earth they proclaimed peace, good will to men.

After the angels retreated to their heavenly abode, the shepherds left their flocks and made their way into Bethlehem. Since Bethlehem was only

a small village, it did not take them long to find the babe of whom the angels spoke. They found Him lying in a manger (a feeding trough), wrapped in swaddling clothes, cared for by His father and mother, all according to the word of the angel.

This report the shepherds spread abroad to whoever would give them an ear.

This report of the shepherds came on the heels of two other most remarkable events that were rumored about.

The first had to do with the aged priest Zacharias. About fifteen months before this, Zacharias had seen a vision of an angel in the temple while offering incense for the people. He had been in the temple much longer than the time necessary to perform his priestly function, and when he came to the door of the temple to pronounce the customary blessing upon the people, he was both deaf and dumb. What an amazing thing! For the first time in 400 years God had revealed Himself. The report of this, no doubt, spread like wildfire throughout Judea.

The second remarkable event rumored about also involved the aged Zacharias. About nine months after God's revelation to him at the temple, Zacharias' aged wife brought forth their first and only child, a man-child. At the circumcision of their son the aged Zacharias suddenly received again his speech and began to prophesy. He told of the appearance of the angel of the Lord to him in the Temple. This miracle child born to him and his wife was the forerunner of the promised Savior. What remarkable news!

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And now some six months later this report of the shepherds was noised abroad. Angels had appeared to them, announcing the birth of the Christ-child! They had even seen Him in a stable on the outskirts of Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

* * * * *

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them concerning this child.

They wondered.

This does not mean that they doubted. The term "wonder" has taken on the element of doubt in our modern English. Doubt, however, did not characterize the wonder of the citizens of Bethlehem. For they had no reason to doubt the report of the shepherds. These were obviously men of good standing in Bethlehem. Otherwise the Lord would not have chosen them to receive the angelic news of the Savior's birth. Besides, there were the other reports of the angel's appearance to Zacharias and his miracle child. No, the citizens of Bethlehem did not doubt the word of the shepherds. They wondered, that is, they marveled. They were filled with awe and amazement.

The striking thing about this all, however, is that this wonder did not move anyone to go and see the Christ-child, as the shepherds had. You might expect the stable where Jesus was born to be crowded with those who sought to worship the Christ-child. You would at least expect some to visit out of curiosity. But we read nothing of this in the Scriptures. And several months later when the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem seeking Him who was born King of the Jews, no one knew anything about the babe of Bethlehem. And remember, Jerusalem was not that far from Bethlehem. Quite obviously no one bothered to see the Christ-child. They marveled at the report of the shepherds. But they did not come to worship or even to visit.

The reaction of Mary to these same shepherds, when they came to her and reported the appearance and message of the angels, is found in the

next verse. She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. That is, she thought upon these things, meditated upon them often, cherished them. This is set forth as the contrast to the reaction of the citizens of Bethlehem. They were filled with awe and amazement. But they neither cherished these things nor dwelt upon them for any length of time. Very quickly these things were all forgotten.

What explains this reaction of Bethlehem's citizens?

This is the reaction of unbelief!

The nation of Israel had become apostate. She was characterized by unbelief, an unbelief that determined the expectations of the people. They longed for earthly power and wealth. Israel some time ago had been swallowed up by the Roman empire. How the people longed to throw off the oppression of Rome and return to the glory days of David and Solomon when Israel was the world power.

All this apostate Israel expected to have through the Savior God had promised.

Mind you, God had not promised such a Savior. He had spoken through the prophets of a Savior who would make payment for the sin of His people and deliver them from the spiritual oppression of sin. He had spoken, indeed, of a kingdom, but of a heavenly kingdom wherein God's people would live in the blessedness of God's fellowship.

But apostate Israel had blindly misinterpreted these promises. We must bear in mind that the unbeliever believes what he wants to believe. If God's revelation does not measure up to his expectations, the unbeliever distorts God's Word to his own liking. This is exactly what apostate Israel did. They clung to God's promise for a Savior; but they distorted it to their own liking, so that they looked for an earthly savior from the hand of God, a savior who would restore the nation to her former place of earthly power and wealth.

Small wonder, then, that Bethlehem had no interest in the Christ-child!

For the Christ child was born in the lowliest of circumstances. He was to be found in a foul cattle stall, reeking with the stench of animals. His bed was a feeding trough. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. His parents were obviously poor and of no account in Israel. What could ever come of such a child? Were He born of those who held earthly power, perhaps in a royal palace amidst splendor and wealth, it might be different. But certainly they were not interested in this child of whom the shepherds spoke. His poverty offended them. Wonder they must. For who could deny the report of the shepherds. But as quickly as they could, they dismissed what they had heard, never bothering so much as to visit the child.

* * * * *

This same reaction of unbelief has prevailed down to the present.

*Perhaps the highest insult
is the world's use
of the birth of Christ
to promote a peace on earth
void of any peace with God.*

The world of unbelief is not interested in God's salvation. It is interested in a salvation of its own designs — a utopia free from all the misery that has plagued mankind throughout history, a heaven here on earth. For this reason the world rejects the Christ of the Scriptures. Oh, indeed, the world is forced from time to time to marvel at God's Savior, at His birth, miracles, death, resurrection, the signs of His coming. But invariably the world dismisses these great works of salvation as quickly as did the citizens of Bethlehem.

This becomes very evident during the Christmas season. The world has commercialized the birth of Christ. It uses Christ's birth as an occasion for drunkenness and partying. Perhaps the highest insult is the world's use of the birth of Christ to promote a peace on earth void of any peace with God. In none of this does the world

keep or ponder in its heart the Christ-child, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.

However, the believing saints of God do.

For they see in the manger scene

a divine sign.

In the poverty of the manger they see the Son of God come into the poverty of their sin, that He might save them from sin's guilt and power and bring them to the riches of eternal

life.

By faith they wonder.

By faith they also keep all these things and ponder them in their heart. □

Editorially speaking ...

All of us who are involved in publishing the *Standard Bearer* wish our readers the peace of the Savior's coming.

We have devoted this issue of the magazine to the birth of Jesus Christ. Our desire and prayer are that the Holy Spirit will use these words about the Incarnate Word to promote the peace of the people of God.

The contributors to this special

issue deserve our thanks. The idea of a special, Christmas issue came up late. The writers accepted their assignment, and produced, on very short notice. This kind of cooperation encourages us who are responsible for seeing to the publishing of the *SB*. We are grateful.

The writers will not take it ill of us if we single out the two women who write for this issue, Viola DeBoer

and Suzanne Looyenga. Both responded to special requests — Mrs. DeBoer that she tell the story of Jesus' birth to our young children and Mrs. Looyenga that she compose a poem on the message of Christmas.

If you enjoy and profit from the articles and poem, let the writers know. □

— DJE

Editorial

He Came for Friendship

And so in these last times the Lord has restored us to His friendship by His Incarnation.

— Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*
(c. A.D. 180)

The wonder is not only that He came to us but also that He came for friendship.

God the eternal Son came to us in the conception of the holy child Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. From afar, He came — from the heights of heaven, from the "realms of glory," from the bosom of the Father where eternally He lies embracing and being embraced in love. Close to us, He came — to earth, into the sphere of sin and curse and death, in our flesh.

He came by creating from the virgin and uniting to Himself a hu-

man nature, body and soul. The Son of God, eternally begotten of the being of the Father, became an embryo. The name for His coming is "Incarnation" — "In-fleshing."

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ..." (John 1:14).

This was a wonder. This was *the* wonder. All of the wonders that preceded, beginning with creation, culminated in the Incarnation. All of the wonders that follow, ending with the creation of the new world, flow from the Incarnation.

It was a wonder of power. More than any other miracle this one showed that nothing is impossible with God. Godhead and humanity, so radically different and since the fall so sharply divided, were united. The union was vital and close. The

two natures were joined in the one Person of the eternal Son. Between them was communion. It belonged to the awesome power of the wonder that the way in which it occurred was a virgin conception and birth. The One who performed the deed was the Holy Spirit, the "Power of the Highest." In doing it, He kept perfectly pure the human nature that He formed out of the depraved nature of the virgin. The baby was fully God and a real, holy human.

Still more glorious was the Incarnation as a wonder also of love. The Son of God came as our Friend. His attitude toward us was good will. His mission was our help. His purpose was our living with God in communion and camaraderie. Because He came for friendship, He had to

come as He did. Our sins separated us from God. The guilt of our sin made us unworthy of fellowship. The depravity of our sin made us incapable of fellowship. Reconciliation and renewal required One who is both God and man in the unity of one Person.

*The womb from which
the Incarnation itself
issued eternally
was the divine counsel
of friendship.*

The Son came for friendship because this was the will of God who sent Him. God decreed the Incarnation in His love for us, a love that desired friendship with the beloved. The womb from which the incarnate Son came historically was that of Mary. The womb from which the Incarnation itself issued eternally was the divine counsel of friendship. God is eternally our Friend, and would have us for His friends. In Christ, God came for friendship.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world ..." (I John 4:9).

The wonderful love of the Incarnation was gracious. God did not need our friendship. For the living and true God is not a solitary, lonely God existing in splendid isolation. He is Triune. He is Father and Son enjoying happy friendship in the Holy Spirit. Thus God is blissful love in Himself. Neither did God create man nor did He redeem men because He needed man. When we were enemies, God lacked nothing. Our hostility toward God did not deprive God of friendship, but ourselves. The Incarnation was not born of divine need but of divine grace. God willed to share His bliss with us by opening up to us His own friendship. The Incarnation was not like a lonely person's taking in boarders in order to find companionship. But it was like a full and perfectly happy family's

adopting an abandoned waif for no other reason than to enable the child to enjoy the family's own delight.

And those to whom God went out in the incarnate Son for friendship were His enemies. They had betrayed Him. They had spoiled His grand work of creation. They had turned His kingdom over to His foe. They hated Him. They challenged His sovereignty. They profaned His holiness. They transgressed His righteousness. They blasphemed His Name. They were rebels devoted to revolution against Him. Friendship would be costly for God. It would cost Him His Son: "He ... spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up ..." (Rom. 8:32). Friendship would be costly for the Son: "(He) made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a slave and ... humbled Himself ... unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7ff.). The Incarnation was the route to the cross.

In power and love, He came for friendship.

The Bible calls this friendship the covenant. The Incarnation was *due* to the covenant. The explanation of the wonder is that God remembered His covenant (Luke 1:72). The Incarnation *aimed* at the covenant. Becoming flesh, the Word dwelt among us, as a Friend dwells with His friends (John 1:14). The Incarnation *was* the covenant. The name of the incarnate Son was "Immanuel," i.e., 'God-with-us,' or 'Covenant.' In Himself, Jesus is the friendship between God and man. Friendship with God for us, therefore, is only in Jesus. We must be reconciled to God by His blood, and we must be united to Him by His Spirit.

God did not come for friendship with all His enemies indiscriminately. One chooses his friends. God is particular in His friendship. He chose His friends in the eternal decree of predestination. For them, God sent the Son. For them, the Son came. These are the men and women who are now united to God by regeneration, strikingly described by the old Reformed theologian Aegidius Francken as "that gracious presence

and union of God with (the elect sinner) by which God becomes the origin of his life." Regeneration is an act of friendship.

These are the persons who are irresistibly called by the gospel out of their alienation, enmity, and loneliness unto conscious fellowship with God in Jesus Christ by a true faith. The calling is an act of friendship. Their intimate union with the Son of God is made continually closer by the use of the sacraments. The sacraments strengthen friendship, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches concerning the Lord's Supper: "more and more united to His sacred body" (Lord's Day 28).

These are the people whose life on earth is a walk with God in prayer and obedience. The Christian life is friendship. This is their life in a true church, instituted in the offices, where Christ is acknowledged as the only Head of the church inasmuch as all things are managed according to the pure Word of God. Friendship with God means church-life—sound, lively church-life.

The friends of God celebrate the Incarnation by which they have this friendship with God. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's Day from afar. God-fearing Jews gave thanks at the birth of Christ. Gentiles worshiped and gave gifts. Old people were glad. An unborn child leaped for joy in his mother's womb. The angels of heaven sang.

*Celebration
of the Incarnation
must take form
in the activity of friendship
among the friends of God.*

There is a wonderful friendship in all this celebration of the Incarnation, a communion that overcomes all natural differences that divide. United in their celebration of the birth of Jesus are Jew and Gentile; Old Testament and New Testament peoples of God; rich and poor; male and female;

old and young; men and angels; heaven and earth. Their communion with each other is their common union with the Christ-child. But their union with Him results in communion with each other.

He came also for our friendship with each other!

This points the way to a living, spiritual, genuine celebration of the Incarnation. It is our living in friendship with each other in the church and in the family. The great incarnational passages in the New Testament insist on this as the practical purpose of the incarnate Son Himself in His coming and as the practical purpose of the Triune God who sent Him.

Philippians 2:6ff. reminds us of the Incarnation so that we will have

the mind of Christ toward each other in the congregation, a mind that looks on the things of the others, i.e., a mind of friendship. II Corinthians 8:9 views the Incarnation as Christ's voluntary impoverishing of Himself on behalf of our becoming rich in order to stimulate the saints to dig deep in their pockets for the offering being taken for the poor, i.e., an act of friendship. I John 4:10,11 presents the Incarnation as the revelation of the love of God for guilty sinners with the purpose of calling these now forgiven sinners "also to love one another," i.e., a life of friendship.

Celebration of the Incarnation must take form in the activity of friendship among the friends of God. There must be good will toward each other,

help of each other, forgiveness ending in reconciliation, and living fellowship. It must begin at home in our marriages and families. It must extend to the members of the church.

This is the will of God in the Incarnation.

This is the work of the Incarnation itself. The Incarnation creates the unbreakable bond of marriage, establishes harmonious homes, moves feuding saints to forgive and reconcile in the way of repentance, and gives peace in the congregation.

This too is a wonder of power and love.

The power and love of Him who came for friendship.

Jesus. □

— DJE

Letter

More on "Experimental Religion"

After reading your exhortation to active participation and the question and answer given in the letters section (*Standard Bearer*, Nov. 15, 1991) I felt moved to respond.

I agree wholeheartedly with your answer. Our experiences must always be examined and interpreted by the spotlight of Scripture rather than interpreting Scripture by experience, as many do today.

I would say that in many cases where the term "Experimental Religion" is used it is referring to the

practical application of Scripture in the believer's life. Such was the case with A.W. Pink as well as those mentioned by the reader.

However, there are those who hold their experience (Experimental Religion) as a proof-text of spirituality and they are subject to deception and disillusion. This discouragement will result in defeat and has as its foundation doctrinal error.

If you look at the widespread rush toward psychological cures and counseling by many in the professing church, you see an attitude that Scrip-

ture and its application by the Holy Spirit is not enough. Hence, they have departed the faith to lean on their own understanding.

Our foundation must always be the Word of God, for only then shall we "have good success" (Josh. 1:8). Whether we call it "Experimental" or "Experiential" matters not as long as our definition as well as practice is Scripturally, doctrinally sound.

Thanks for touching upon this subject.

Bill Sutherland
Houston, TX

*For unto you is born this day
in the city of David
a Savior,
which is Christ the Lord.*

The Genealogy of Jesus (or, Jesus the Son of Nathan)

Prof. David Engelsma

The Issue

The genealogy of Jesus concerns His descent as a real man from His ancestors. It is His "family tree." This is a proper object of study because the Bible both reveals Jesus' line of descent and points out that this line of descent is important. Scripture gives Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1 and in Luke 3:23-38. The importance of His "family tree" is to be found in God's promise that the Messiah would be born from certain Old Testament persons and families. Jesus must fulfill these promises.

Two essential aspects of Jesus' genealogy may not be disputed. First, Jesus is physically descended from Adam and Eve. This is demanded by the original promise of the gospel in Genesis 3:15: He who is to crush the Serpent's head and thus deliver the chosen church of God will be the seed of mother Eve. We notice that the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3 traces Jesus back to Adam: "which was the son of Adam" (v. 38).

A second essential feature of our Lord's genealogy is that He is physically descended from David, Israel's great king. In II Samuel 7:12ff., Jehovah God promised to David that the Messiah would be his son: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will

establish his kingdom" (v. 12). Psalm 89 identifies this child as the Messiah. In Romans 1:3, Paul proclaims that Jesus fulfills this promise: "Jesus Christ ... which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."

Implied by Jesus' descent from David is that He belongs to the tribe of Judah, to the nation of Israel, and to the family of Abraham. All of this is required by Old Testament promises. It is also implied that Jesus' mother Mary was in the line, or family, of David. This must be asserted, not only because scholars question it, but also because the Bible never explicitly states that Mary, Jesus' only biological parent, was a daughter of David. Several times Scripture calls Joseph a descendant of David but never does it say this of Mary (cf. Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:27; Luke 2:4). The fact that Jesus was of David's line establishes that His mother was of this line.

The difficult and controversial issue in the matter of the genealogy of Jesus is His descent between David and Mary. What is the family-line of Jesus from His royal great grandfather to His lowly mother? It is widely held in the Protestant Reformed Churches that Jesus descended from David through the royal line of David's son Solomon. On this view, Mary belonged to that royal line. In fact, it is maintained that the virgin was the sole survivor of the royal line. The royal line ended in her. This was the teaching of the Rev. Herman Hoeksema (cf. *The Triple Knowledge*, Vol. 1, pp. 603ff.).

I want to show that the Savior came to us not through Solomon and

the royal line but through another son of King David, namely, Nathan. Nathan was also a son of David and Bathsheba, as we read in I Chronicles 3:5: "And these were born unto him (David) in Jerusalem; Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, four, of Bathsheba (Bathsheba)..." (cf. also II Sam. 5:14). Jesus and Mary were not in the royal line. But Joseph, the husband of Mary, was in the royal line, a physical descendant of Solomon, Rehoboam, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Jehoiachin.

This is the issue.

Crucial for settling the issue are the two genealogies at the beginning of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The important question about these genealogies is this: Which of them gives the actual, physical descent of Jesus through Mary from David?

Both of them obviously have to do with the birth of Jesus. Seemingly, however, both of them give the genealogy not of Mary but of Joseph. Matthew's genealogy, which begins with Abraham and goes forward, ends with Joseph (Matt. 1:16). Luke's genealogy, which begins with Jesus and goes backward, seems to run through Joseph (Luke 3:23). This confronts us with a problem. It seems that neither of them gives us the genealogy of Jesus, for Scripture tells us that Jesus did not come from Joseph (Matt. 1:18-25).

What increases our problem is that the two genealogies are different. This is immediately and conclusively plain to every reader. In fact, enemies of Scripture have gleefully pounced on this as proof that the Bible is fal-

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lible. "Look," they exclaim, "here are two genealogies of Joseph that are completely different."

Whatever now may be the solution of the problem, the difference between the genealogies is this. Matthew's gives the royal line of David, the line that runs through Solomon and Judah's kings. Luke's genealogy gives the "family-tree" of David through that other son, Nathan (cf. v. 31). From Abraham to David, the genealogies are the same; from David to Jesus, they are different. Matthew traces the line of Solomon, whereas Luke traces the line of Nathan.

Which is the genealogy of Jesus?

Understanding the Genealogies

Matthew's genealogy in verses 1-17 is that of Joseph, whereas Luke's is that of Jesus Himself according to actual, physical descent through Mary. That Matthew's is the genealogy of Joseph is clear and unchallengeable. It says so: "And Jacob begat Joseph" (v. 16). Throughout Matthew's genealogy, the word "begat" means physical begetting, or procreation. It keeps this meaning in verse 16: Jacob, descendant of Solomon, fathered Joseph.

But the genealogy of Matthew 1 is the royal line. Joseph, therefore, belonged to the royal line. The royal blood of Solomon coursed through Joseph's veins. As far as Matthew is concerned the royal line of David ended in Joseph, the man engaged to the virgin who would become the mother of the Christ.

I suggest that this has wonderful possibilities for telling the Christmas story of Luke 2. The humble Jew trudging into Bethlehem with his pregnant wife in order to register for taxation; the man who is turned away from the inn in the city of David; the man who spends the night in the stable — this man is the son of Solomon, heir-apparent to the throne of Israel, scion of a glorious dynasty.

The genealogy in Luke 3 is the record of the physical ancestry of Jesus through His mother Mary. Jesus is descended from David through

Nathan. A correct translation of verse 23 makes this clearer. The translation of the King James Version is not correct: "Jesus ... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." This makes Joseph the son of Heli. But we know from Matthew 1 that Joseph is the son of Jacob. The correct translation of verse 23 is: "Jesus ... being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli." Not Joseph, but Jesus is the son of Heli. Heli was the father of Mary and, therefore, Jesus' maternal grandfather. Mary's name is omitted from the register in keeping with the Jewish custom. Mary and her father Heli descended from Nathan (v. 31).

Several things should be mentioned in defense of this explanation of the genealogies and this understanding of the genealogy of Jesus. First, contrary to popular opinion, the Messiah does not have to come from the royal line that runs through Solomon. It is enough that He come from David (cf. II Sam. 7:12ff.; Psalm 89:35, 36).

Second, the Bible teaches that the Messiah will *not* come from the royal line, and *may* not come from the royal line. The royal line became unfaithful, disobedient, and apostate. The judgment of God upon it was that it would not produce the everlasting King who establishes the kingdom of God. The next to the last king of Judah in the Old Testament was Jehoiachin, called "Jechonias" in Matthew 1:11. Upon him and his descendants fell the judgment recorded in Jeremiah 22:30: "Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." According to Matthew 1, Jehoiachin produces Joseph. But Joseph is not the father of the Messiah-King who sits on the throne of David. This is the emphatic teaching of Matthew 1:18ff.

Third, the view that Mary was in the royal line and that Matthew 1 is the genealogy of Mary, not of Joseph, simply cannot be maintained. To make Matthew 1 the genealogy of

Mary, it is necessary to deny that "begat" in verse 16 refers to physical begetting. On this view, Jacob actually begat Mary. But Joseph's name is inserted because of his legal relationship to Jacob as Mary's husband. This explanation is impossible since "begat" means physical procreation. The register of the royal line in Matthew 1 is the genealogy of Joseph.

The view of some that Mary was in the royal line also depends upon a mistaken interpretation of Luke 1:34, Mary's astonished response to the Annunciation: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" This is taken to mean that Mary knew all along that she was the sole survivor of the royal line. She had figured out that no male remained in the royal line. Her response to the angel was, "I cannot bring forth the Messiah because I am not aware of any man whom I can marry."

But this is misunderstanding of Mary's words. "Know" here does not have the sense of 'being aware of someone,' but rather refers, as often in the Bible, to sexual intercourse. The angel has said to her that she will conceive a child, evidently at once and in her present virginal condition. Mary's perfectly natural response is, "How can I possibly conceive a child apart from sexual relations with a man?" She had certainly not determined that, as the sole survivor of the royal line, she would have to be the mother of the Savior. When the angel addressed her as "blessed among women," Mary was "troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be" (v. 29). As for a male survivor in the royal line, there was one, Joseph. Mary was engaged to him. But Joseph "knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Matt. 1:25).

Jesus descended from David through the obscure Nathan, not through Solomon and the royal line. This has interesting and profound implications.

Some Implications

First, God kept His Word to David. He fulfilled it differently than

anyone expected, through insignificant Nathan rather than through prominent Solomon. But He kept His promised Word.

Second, God judged the royal line of Israel for its rebellion and apostasy. The judgment began already with Solomon. It culminated in the dreadful Word upon Jehoiachin. It was evident in Israel's lack of a king during the five hundred years after the return from Babylon. It was realized in the historical fact that Matthew calls attention to in the first

chapter of his gospel: Jesus was not produced by the royal line.

Third, in the way of this just judgment God exalts the humble line of Nathan. Rejecting the outwardly glorious line of Solomon, God chooses lowly Nathan to bring forth the Great King. The message of the genealogy of Jesus is the gospel of grace. God lifts up the nobodies and puts down the somebodies. Not the noble did God choose, but the lowly, the despised, and the no-account: a maid in

Nazareth; the obscure family of Nathan; the shepherd-boy of Bethlehem. Is not this exactly what Mary herself sang in celebration of the genealogy of Jesus? "My soul doth magnify the Lord ... for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden ... He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:46ff.).

His purpose?

That the glory of the coming of the Christ be His own. □

The Church's Observance of Christmas

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

It is that time of year again when we celebrate Christmas. Radio stations air Christmas music. Store fronts and circulars advertise Christmas wares. Homes and shops are decorated for the holiday season. Christmas is observed the world over, in the United States and Europe, by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Even if we wanted to forget Christmas, the world would not let us.

What really is the origin of the day? What is the meaning and purpose of Christmas? What historically has been the attitude of the church towards Christmas? Ought the church today to observe Christmas in any special way?

The Origin of Christmas

Although the precise origin of Christmas is uncertain, it is certain

that the early celebrations of Christmas were mingled with pagan observances. Long before Christmas became the customary day on which the church commemorated the wonder of the incarnation, the heathen world observed the day in a special way. The first mention of the celebration of Christmas occurs in A.D. 336 in an early Roman calendar. At this time various peoples in Europe held festivals in mid-December, at the time of the winter solstice. These festivals celebrated the end of the harvest season and anticipated the arrival of the new year. As part of these celebrations, the people prepared special foods, decorated their homes with greenery, and joined in singing and gift-giving.

It was not until late in the fourth century that Christmas became a Christian holiday. This took place under the Emperor Constantine who made Christianity the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire. At this time many of the pagan celebrations were assimilated into Christianity. This was true also of Christmas. The day became a significant day on the

ecclesiastical calendar, the day marking the festival of Christ's birth. The priests officiated at special masses, and hence the day came to be known as "Christ-mass," or "Christmas."

This is the beginning of any special observance of the nativity. There is no evidence that the apostolic church commemorated Christ's birth in any special way or on any special day. The church fathers of the first three centuries do not either make any reference to the observance of Christmas. Undoubtedly this is partly explained by the fact that no corresponding festival was celebrated in the Old Testament, as was the case with Easter and Pentecost. The celebration of the early church focused on the death and resurrection of Christ, as is plain from the record of the Book of Acts and the fact of the church's gathering on the first day of each week, the day of Christ's resurrection, for weekly worship.

The Observance of Christmas by the Churches of the Reformation

By the time of the Reformation, the observance of Christmas had be-

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come an ecclesiastical institution. But like the other days and festivals regarded by Roman Catholicism, the observance of Christmas had become carnal and superstitious.

The Reformers reacted against this abuse by abolishing the observance of special days by the church. This abolition of days included Christmas.

There were particular reasons why the Reformers rejected the observance of Christmas. In the first place, there is no indication whatsoever that Christ was born on December 25. Fact is that, from everything we read in the Scriptures, we must conclude that He was born in the warmer months of the year, probably the spring, and not during the winter. If it was winter, the shepherds would not have been spending the nights out on the open plains while their sheep grazed. Neither would the Christ-child have been warm at night in an unheated stable with only swaddling clothes for covers.

In the second place, the Reformers were moved to reject the observance of Christmas by the fact that the observance of the day was not of divine but of human institution. The observance of Christmas cannot be grounded, like the weekly Sabbath, either on direct command from God or example of the church in the New Testament. The day as a special day to be observed by Christians was instituted by the church.

The Reformers' rejection of Christmas was also motivated by their fear that the observance of special days would lead to the minimizing of the Sabbath, the God-ordained day of worship. This was not an altogether unfounded fear. This had happened in the Roman Catholic Church. Even today there are those who, although they hardly ever attend the weekly worship services of the church, feel the necessity of gracing the church building with their presence on Christmas and on Easter.

It also belonged to the reasons for their forbidding any longer the observance of Christmas that the Reformers feared the involvement of

the church in paganistic celebrations. The Reformers were aware of the tainted origin of the Christmas celebration, as well as the foolishness that had become associated with its observance. They were fearful of these evil influences on the church and the members of the church.

This rejection of Christmas continued in the churches of the Reformation. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, many of them to this day, rejected all observance of Christmas. The Puritans condemned the celebration and even issued ordinances forbidding all church services and festivities on Christmas. This viewpoint was carried over to America from England by the Pilgrims.

The Dutch Reformed Churches

At first, the observance of Christmas was also rejected by the Dutch Reformed churches. The conviction that there ought not be a multiplication of man-made days in the church, and the concern that there be no minimizing of the observance of the weekly Sabbath, were strong. The Synod of Dordt, 1574, decreed that the weekly Sabbath alone should be observed in the churches and that there should be no observance of any other days, including Christmas. This same synod did decide, however, that it would be appropriate for the ministers to preach about the birth of Christ on the Sunday preceding Christmas.

Soon, however, this attitude changed. Already by 1578, the Synod of Dordt made allowances for the observance of Christmas by the churches. Monsma and VanDellen state in their *Church Order Commentary*, page 274:

The Synod of Dordt, 1578, Article 68, declared in substance that it would be desirable to celebrate Sunday only according to God's ordinance. But, inasmuch as Christmas Day and the day following upon Christmas, as well as the days following upon Easter and Pentecost and in some places also New Year's Day, and Ascension Day were legal holidays by authority of the governments, the Ministers should preach appropriately on these days in order to turn a fruitless and

harmful idleness (*lediggang*) into a holy and profitable exercise.

Rather than to see these days given over to the danger of abuse and revelry, the churches accommodated themselves to circumstances and began to celebrate these days. The people of God were called together for prayer and worship under the preaching of the gospel.

Since 1578 subsequent synods have revised and expanded what is now Article 67 of our *Church Order*. That article binds the observance of Christmas upon the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The Churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, the Day of Prayer, the National Thanksgiving Day, and Old and New Year's Day.

Our Observance of Christmas

Our observance of Christmas is not merely, however, a matter of fulfilling the letter of the law of Article 67 of the *Church Order*. There are benefits, outstanding spiritual benefits, for the church in a sanctified observance of the day.

*... who can fault the church
for calling special attention
to His birth
and the significance
of His birth
one day in the year?*

Although it certainly must be admitted that Christmas is not of divine but human appointment, we do not consider this an objection sufficient to abolish the church's observance of the day. Certainly the eldership has the authority to call the congregation to worship at appropriate times, whether that be a time of war, during drought, or in observance of the birth of Jesus. The authority of the elders in this matter is similar to their authority to call the church to worship twice on the Lord's Day, even though there is no express command

from God that the church must worship twice on Sunday. Here the authority of the elders is controlled by that which "... tends to nourish and preserve concord, and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God ..." (Belgic Confession, Article 32).

And who can doubt the value of the church's attention being directed to the wonder of grace, the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ? Even if there can be no certainty that Jesus was born on December 25, who can fault the church for calling special attention to His birth and the significance of His birth one day in the year? Neither does this mean that we exclude attention to the incarnation at

other times, confining contemplation of it to Christmas. Not at all! The great mystery of godliness, the wonder of the Word made flesh, receives attention in every sermon delivered by the Reformed preacher, whether explicitly or implicitly. The church's observance of the birth of Christ is a perpetual observance, day in and day out, Sunday after Sunday.

It certainly is of practical benefit for the church to gather for worship on Christmas. Not only does this provide the opportunity for the church to call attention to the real meaning of Christmas, but it also provides occasion for words of warning against the

abuse of Christmas and the corruption of Christmas by the world.

What must be at the heart of the church's observance of Christmas is the Word. The church's observance of the day must be in the official gathering for public worship. That is the prescription of Article 67. And at the heart of public worship is the preaching of the Word. Not plays and pageants, but preaching is how the church observes Christmas. But then preaching that not only on Christmas, but all through the year honors the babe of Bethlehem as the Son of God, the sovereign Savior, the King of kings. □

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Marking the Christmas Season

The topic assigned me is for a special issue on Christmas. It strikes me that it is made to order for the rubric "When Thou Sittest In Thine House..." which deals with the Christian family and home. If there is one notion that we associate with Christmas it is that of family get-togethers. And if there is one fear we have, it is, I should think, the adverse effect that the world's celebration can have on our children (some might even say, the adverse effect the CHURCH'S celebration of Christmas has on our children). So this article will serve double duty.

We are raising children and directing our families through the

treacherous currents of the late 20th century. And one of the most powerful currents in our present-day society is the holiday madness, the Christmas season. It touches on the lives of every one of us. It certainly bombards our children. Drive down the streets; they are festooned with decorations and lined with lights. Turn on the radio; the Christmas songs fill the air. Turn on the TV, or open your mailbox; and advertisements for a veritable mountain of merchandise will bury you like an avalanche. As your children look at the catalogs confronting them with every delightful toy imaginable, their eyes become large with expectation. You and they can not ignore it. The arrival of the Christmas season shouts at us from every corner.

Weighty issues are involved both for the church and for the individual believer and the Christian family. The latter is our concern in this article.

The question arises, to what extent ought we as heads of homes permit our families to be involved in the "holiday" festivities at all? Should there be any indication that we have even noted the season? Perhaps no presents, no trees, no colored lights, no wreaths, no sending of greeting cards, and maybe not even getting together as family with relatives? Or maybe the latter could be permitted, with a few cards sent out, and possibly even a wreath ... but no more?

And here, of course, is the problem. You make your choice, I make mine. But whose observance (or lack) thereof is the standard?

At this point, appeal is commonly made to Christian liberty. You do not intend to mark this time of the year with a tree, lights, or gift exchange and will not permit your family to do so. I can respect you for that. But does that therefore mean I ought not? There is a sin in these things?

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Says who? You choose to buy gifts for your children on their birthday, we for ours when the relatives get together during the Christmas holiday. The one is wrong, the other is not? A person is going to be hard pressed to forbid altogether the marking of the season with any "seasonal" activities. The appeal to Christian liberty is certainly legitimate.

Still, it would be foolish to say that an appeal to Christian liberty is an adequate answer for all the abuses of our day and age in this area. One may say, "You may not legislate how I and all other Christians mark the holiday season!" (which is true), but it borders on sheer folly not to recognize practical dangers.

The question arises, by marking Christmas in so many ways, as our society does (the world!) with trees, and lights, and presents, are we not succumbing to the spirit of the age?

And what are we teaching our children? Marking Christ's birth simply becomes the occasion for the thing that really interests them, namely, getting all those gifts. The wonder of the Incarnation is buried and lost amidst the onslaught of materialism and greed. The ones who profit most are the merchants. The least? The saints. So it seems.

Isn't it high time we lay all this yuletide business aside, and cease trying to sanctify the profane both as individuals (families) and as churches?

*Parents may feel compelled
to prove their love,
not only by
buying for the child
far beyond
what is good for him,
but also by spending
far beyond their means.*

What is our response?

First of all, we do well to listen to those who remind us of the dangers. Those dangers are not to be mini-

mized. There is the gross materialism. It is not only children that get lost in the maze of gifts and presents. Adults do. Parents may feel compelled to prove their love, not only by buying for the child far beyond what is good for him, but also by spending far beyond their means. Families end up in debt because of all the gifts dad and mom felt they had to buy to keep their children happy (and to avoid being called a "Scrooge"). This is not unknown in Christian families.

It is sin, that's all. It is that, first of all, because the child begins to think he has a right to a multitude of presents; his happiness hinges on it. And if this year's "haul" is less than last year's, he has a legitimate complaint. And we have promoted this attitude by catering to their "I wants." What they need is instruction about Christian happiness and contentment, not an excess of this world's goods.

But such is sin also because there is sinful stewardship involved. The child gets the unnecessary gifts... and what goes begging? The kingdom causes, the church budget, the school tuition, the benevolence fund, and the special causes. Or though we give to those causes, we contribute far less than we should have because so much has been spent buying the presents. What has been violated is nothing less than a central biblical principle, namely, seeking first the kingdom.

And the holiday eating and drinking so often gets out of hand (especially the drinking!). How can you relax and be merry without consuming generous amounts of "speak-easy"? It is party after party and everything is funny. It is "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow...?!" And the conscience is salved by singing a few "Silent Night(s), Holy Night(s)" before the guests disperse, some of whom do a bit of weaving as they head down the road.

And thus the season is sanctified! No, I think not. But still, for many, so it goes. And we are not immune.

So what is the solution? To scrap it (that is, our marking of Christ's birth in December, or at least all the

holiday trappings that go along with it: lights, trees, gifts, and family get-togethers) and to take the vow of austerity?

While I well understand the sentiment, I can not agree with the solution.

*Declaring that
every marking
of the season
is transgression
and carnality
is neither right nor wise.*

Do not get me wrong. Heads of homes may do this if they please. But whether they will accomplish what they intend is another question.

Suppose the church decided, due to the world's abuse and the holiday's pagan origin, to cease marking (in December) Christ's Incarnation in any ecclesiastical way. No worship service, no programs. Just silence. What then? Things would change? That would be the end of trees and wreaths and gifts with us? I doubt it.

But more seriously, would the church have the right or ability to enforce such a thing in the homes of her members?

What if my dear fellow saint next door decides to put a tree up anyway with a few lights in the window, and they exchange gifts? Now what? They are to be put under discipline? For deciding in December to exchange gifts? In February it would be alright? What if Jr. announces at that time, "We do it now rather than at Christmas"?

Declaring that every marking of the season is transgression and carnality is neither right nor wise. You have here an area impossible to legislate. And in the end the church would have to make absurd distinctions as to what is permissible and what is not. A Christmas tree is a matter worthy of discipline or rebuke? Then what about a wreath? All right, I am going to buy my wife two poinsettias. What can you say about that? And

what if there is more frequent reference in December in the prayers of some to the wonder of the incarnation than, say, in early spring? That is a sign of unspirituality? Less reference in December to this Wonder would be better? This would help our children? We are going to listen for it in each other's prayers and measure spirituality accordingly? Let us beware the legalism.

This is not to say that nothing should be done by our families to guard against the world's materialistic excesses and abuses at this time of the year. There are things which must be said. That which has to do with Santa Claus is to be condemned. Our children must understand the red-suited elf does not exist. To them he certainly is "believable." They have no more difficulty or disinclination to believe that he exists than to believe that the devil exists, whom they have never seen either. The evil? To this "omnipresent, all-knowing" Santa is attributed divine attributes. "He knows when you're asleep, He knows when you're awake...." For their behavior during the past year children are answerable to him. So they say. He will punish or reward.

This is no innocent, childish fairytale. This is humbug, rubbish, and evil. Mr. Claus is set up as a competitor to our children's all-knowing, caring heavenly Father. We are remiss if we permit this confusion in our children's minds. Santa Claus is not a matter of Christian liberty.

In the second place we are to teach our children not to partake in the abuses and excesses of our materialistic age, especially as that comes to extravagant expression during the holidays.

*Far wiser it is ...
to teach our children
the principle of moderation
in all things....*

In my judgment one can accomplish this better by practicing the prin-

ciple of moderation in holiday "customs" than by attempting to ignore the festivities altogether or to remain completely uninvolved. Why? Because you can practice a consistent moderation and restraint, but you are not going to be able to practice a complete severance from all markings of the customs in any consistent way. Someone is going to give you (or your child) a gift or two. Are you going to give them back? Relatives are going to have their get-togethers inviting your family. What better time of the year than when fathers have some days off? You are going to be in a group that sings a few "carols." You can not sing "Silent Night"? What about the Hallelujah Chorus? And some grandmother will not be able to endure the thought of not giving your children (her grandchildren!) gifts while she gives gifts to the rest of them. You will deny her and your children that joy? What if, to be fair, she gives the gifts to them in January anyway?

Far wiser it is, in my judgment, to teach our children the principle of moderation in all things (which is a lesson with lifelong value). The "Christmas" season is a good time to teach them this, not simply in word, but by our deeds. Gifts? Fine, but let them be within our means, not leading our children to equate happiness with extravagance.

And let the same restraint show itself in our eating, our drinking, in holiday decorations, and in all the rest.

We must do what we can to keep the common from burying the sacred, the spiritual. For instance, in our home we do not "open presents" on Christmas morning, but a few days prior to it. Why? In our circles the saints have agreed to come together annually the morning of December 25 to contemplate the wonder of incarnation and to worship. I want as little to intrude into that worship as is possible. Presents just opened beg to be played with. I want my children's minds to be on the Word of God (made flesh) rather than the toys they can not wait to get back to. A small

attempt to keep the focus where it ought to be. You must do what you think is wise.

In the Old Testament, at the time of harvest, the saints spontaneously gathered together and rejoiced in the good things of God and in the company of families and saints, and that under the benediction of God (cf. Ruth 3). We may do likewise in December; but let our celebration be with true joy, unmixed with the world's superficial merrymaking. □

Celebrate Christmas!

Behold the Babe in a manger low.

Revel in the Revealed long ago.

Delight in David's Son now born.

Laud our Lord this happy morn.

Praise the Prince of Peace
who gives.

Honor our Head; forever He lives.

Glorify the Great Shepherd
who feeds us.

Triumph in the Truth who leads us.

Acclaim the second Adam,
our salvation.

Extol Emmanuel, the Incarnation.

Magnify the Messiah;
prophecy fulfilled.

Carol the Chief Cornerstone,
His church He will build.

Joy in Jesus come to save.

Alleluia to the Anointed,
victory o'er the grave!

Revere the Redeemer,
our guilt He has paid.

Worship the Way,
our pathway He has laid.

Proclaim the Prophet
sent from on high.

Sing to the Son of God
whose glory fills the sky.

Celebrate the Christ!

*Viola DeBoer
Hull, Iowa*

The Greatest Gift of All

The Christmas story written especially for younger children

Mrs. Viola DeBoer

Christmas is coming! Does that make you happy and excited? Yes, most children are excited about Christmas. You, as God's covenant children, have special reason to be excited about Christmas. Maybe you are excited about the presents that come at Christmas time. Well, the real Christmas story is about a Gift too — the Greatest Gift of All. The Christmas story is not a make-believe story; this truly happened a long, long time ago. We know that because God tells us so in His Word, the Bible. So, here is the Christmas story about the Greatest Gift of All.

Many, many years ago a man named Joseph and a woman named Mary lived in a town called Nazareth. They were not rich. In fact, they were poor people. But they were happy because they were soon going to have a baby — a very special baby.

The ruler of their country made a law that everyone had to pay money to the ruler. Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to pay their money because that is where their families lived many years before. Bethlehem was a long way from Nazareth and they did not have a fancy chariot with pretty horses to take them to Bethlehem. They had to walk or ride

on an animal, maybe a donkey. It took them at least three days to get to Bethlehem.

When they arrived, they found that Bethlehem was a very busy town, because many others had come to pay their money also. The town was full of people! Mary and Joseph had to find a place to sleep. They asked at the inn (like a motel) but, no, there was not one room left. There was not one room in the whole town left for Mary and Joseph.

They finally stayed in a cave just outside of the town. In this cave people kept their animals. Horses, donkeys, cows, and other animals were in this stable with Mary and Joseph. In this dark and smelly stable Jesus was born! Mary wrapped her special Child in long strips of cloth (swaddling clothes) to keep him warm and then laid him in the manger — the feeding-trough for the animals. This was the very first Christmas!

Mary and Joseph must have been very happy about their new little Son. They knew that He was the Son of God even though He looked just like any other baby. God had told them before Jesus was born that their baby would be the Son of God who would save His people from their sins. So Mary and Joseph were very happy and excited about this Great Gift of God to His people.

But would anyone else know about this great news? Yes! God sent an angel from heaven to tell the news that His Son was born. God sent the angel to some shepherds in the fields. The shepherds were watching their sheep as the animals ate in the fields

that night. Suddenly a very bright light and an angel appeared! The shepherds were very scared! They had never seen such a bright light. But the angel told them not to be afraid for he had very good news to tell them.

He told them that Jesus, the Savior, had been born. They could go and see Him! They would know the baby because He was in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. After the angel told them that, the whole sky filled with angels singing praises to God. All the angels were happy and excited about this Greatest Gift of All!

After the angels went back to heaven, the shepherds hurried to find this Baby. They found Him with Mary and Joseph, and He was lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, just as the angel had said. They worshiped Him because He was the Son of God. The shepherds were very happy and excited about Christmas too! They told everyone they met about God's Great Gift and they returned to their sheep singing praises to God!

Jesus, born on earth, was God's Gift to us. Certainly that was the Greatest Gift of All. The Son of God was born on earth as a baby to save God's people from all their sins that they may live in heaven forever. So, after all your other gifts are broken, you still have the Greatest Gift of All, because this Jesus lives in your hearts right now! That's Christmas! Doesn't that make you happy and excited? Christmas makes all God's people very happy. □

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Peace Through our Lord Jesus Christ

Rev. Cornelius Hanks

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord.

Night had cast its long shadow over the fields of Judea where shepherds watched over their sheep.

This was but a reminder of that long, weary night of sin and death that had rested on mankind ever since we became enemies of God through our fall in paradise.

That night would have been hopelessly dark were it not for the fact that, like the heavenly luminaries, the promise of the dawning of a new day shone through the darkness.

All the believers of the old dispensation cherished the hope of the promise that the prince of darkness would be destroyed, the enmity would be taken away, and salvation would come from the Lord.

They looked for the Savior to bring peace. Abraham longed to see His day. All the patriarchs died, not having received the promise, but having seen it with an eye of faith in the distant future. Spiritual Israel never gave up praying:

O send the day of joy and light,
For long has been our sorrow's night.
Afflicted through the weary years,
We wait until Thy help appears.
(versification of Psalm 90 —
Psalter number 246)

The night had grown late, and it became darker as the dawn approached. For some four hundred years after Judah's return from captivity the voice of prophecy had been silent. There was no prophet, no vision, no dream. This was the time of which Malachi had spoken: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for those that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Among those whom the Lord remembered were the shepherds who kept watch over their sheep on that night appointed by God from all eternity.

We know very little about them. Their names have not been preserved throughout history. How many there were we do not know. What is important for us to know is that they belonged to the remnant according to election of grace, appointed to be the first recipients of the "glad tidings of great joy" as they kept watch over their flock by night.

"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."

No wonder that they were afraid. The glory of heaven had never come nearer to mortal man. Besides, a

messenger from heaven standing there among these ordinary men in their work clothes was enough to embarrass them. Added to that, they were sinners, at enmity with God because of their many transgressions, deserving only God's just wrath and condemnation. They hid their faces in terror.

But the angel set their hearts at ease by telling them that he came with a message that would fill their hearts with unspeakable joy and peace.

"For unto you is born a Savior!"

This message did not come to the powers at Rome, nor to the wise men of Athens; not even to the elite of Jerusalem, but to common, ordinary shepherds as they were carrying out their work throughout the night.

Common, ordinary shepherds, yet representatives of the remnant according to election of grace, representatives of the church of all ages, of every true believer. That means that the message is directed personally to you and me!

A Savior. The name itself reveals how great the mystery of salvation actually is. For the saints of the old dispensation were very much aware that salvation could come only from God.

The song of hope lived in their souls:

My soul in silence waits for God,
My Savior He has proved;
He only is my rock and tower;
I never shall be moved.

(versification of Psalm 62 —
Psalter number 162)

This was declared in so many words through the prophet Isaiah: "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me

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there is no Savior" (Isa. 43:11). This is confirmed by the name that the Savior bears, the name Jesus, which means Jehovah salvation, or, Jehovah saves.

Jesus, whose birth is announced to the shepherds, is none other than the Son of God. He is the second person of the Trinity, the revelation of the Father, the Word that became flesh.

How marvelously simple is the explanation of this amazing wonder of His birth as the angel describes it to Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

We rejoice with the church of all ages, saying, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6).

God lay there in the manger of Bethlehem. Yet He was at the same time fully man. Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, He was flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, appointed from all eternity to be Jesus, our Savior, representative of all those given to Him by the Father.

*If we are ever
to be restored
to God's favor,
satisfaction must be made.*

We call to mind how necessary this was according to the teaching of our Catechism. Lord's Day 5 tells us that by the righteous judgment of God we deserve temporal and eternal punishment. If we are ever to be restored to God's favor, *satisfaction* must be made. God's justice must be satisfied. Our enmity must be taken away. Atonement must be brought for every one of our sins. There is no other way out.

The Catechism reminds us that we can never do that, since we only increase our debt every day. No animal, no angel, nor any other creature, can atone for us, because God's justice demands that the "soul that sins must die."

We are hopelessly lost, except for the fact that God has eternally prepared a way out, atonement for our sins and deliverance from its power through the death of His dear Son on the cross. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting our sins against us.

Thus Jesus carries with Him His own credentials. He is Christ, the Lord.

The name Christ means Anointed. He is appointed of God from all eternity to be the great prophet, the eternal High Priest, and the sovereign King, the fulfillment of all the types of the old dispensation.

Throughout His life and unto all eternity He is completely God and at the same time completely man.

He humbles Himself in the form of a servant. He is called to fight the battle of the Lord against all the powers of darkness. At the very beginning of His ministry He meets His opponent, Satan, and declares war against Him. His power to perform miracles, especially to drive out devils, shows that His victory is sure. Satan does his utmost to hinder Him in His work, finally even kills Him by the hands of His enemies; but through His death of the cross He crushes the head of Satan, overcomes all the powers of sin and death, and triumphantly passes through the grave to His position of power in heaven. The mighty Conqueror is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is now in heaven for the very purpose of blessing us with every temporal and spiritual blessing by His Spirit in our hearts. He lives that we might live triumphantly with Him in His glory.

From heaven He proclaims the glad tidings: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accom-

plished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1, 2).

*I know my sin and misery,
all my imperfections;
but I also know
where to seek
my deliverance.*

By the power of His Word and Spirit He applies His grace to our hearts.

First of all, of this I am assured, that *I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ*. He has made me deeply conscious of my sins, which stand as a barrier between my God and me. He brings me on my knees with the humble prayer, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner." In answer to my prayer He daily assures me of His forgiving mercy. Being justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ.

Moreover, He dwells in me. By the power of His grace and Spirit I can recognize and fight off all the evil attempts of the powers of darkness to overwhelm me. I know my sin and misery, all my imperfections; but I also know where to seek my deliverance. The battle continues day by day, but the victory is sure. More than conquerors are we!

In blessed hope I await the day when the battle is fought, the course is finished, the faith is kept, and the righteous Judge presents me with the victor's crown, and not only me, but also all those who await His coming.

With the shepherds we go to Bethlehem, to return "glorifying and praising God" for all that we have seen and heard. We experience a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." □

Peace in the Church

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

So sang the angels that wonderful night. So heard the shepherds the tidings of great joy on that night, a night they remembered unto their deaths.

Peace is! The angels put no qualifiers on their declaration. Their song made a statement of fact. They announced the presence of peace in the birth of the Prince of peace in a manger in Bethlehem.

Can there be a more wonderful pronouncement? Peace is most precious to the church. Anyone who is a member of a congregation or denomination which is experiencing or has experienced strife of one kind or another will speak highly and frequently of the value and sweetness of peace. Peace in the church is a cherished virtue.

As precious as peace is to the church, it is more so to God. This is obvious from the fact that, along with Jesus being called the "Prince of peace," the Scriptures seven times refer to God as the "God of peace." In addition, the Bible speaks of "the peace of God."

Peace is *in* God. In Him there is the most perfect and undisturbed

harmony, unity and agreement. The three Persons in the Godhead have a beautiful unity of mind, of will, of desire, and of purpose, with not even a hint of discord.

Peace is *of* and *from* God. He "makes peace" (Isa. 45:7; Eph. 2:14,15) and "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." This peace God authors "in all churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33).

The angels sang of peace on earth because the Prince of peace made peace, being God's instrument to reconcile the elect unto God. The "chastisement of our peace was upon Him." (No wonder the angels sang!) Therefore the proclamation of this finished work of Jesus is called the "gospel (good news) of peace." The content of the gospel is that because sinners are justified by faith they have "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). Christ's ambassadors declare the word of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:19) and they "preach peace" (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:16). God speaks peace unto His people (Psa. 85:8; Eph. 2:17).

Each elect of God comes to know this peace of God personally and experientially. Of this the Rev. C. Hanks speaks in the previous article. But peace on earth is seen not only in the individual Christian. It is enjoyed and manifested also in the church.

The church is the gathering of those with whom God has made peace. Being at peace with God, the individual members of that church can be at peace with each other. Being in agreement with God, they can agree with each other. An effect of Christ's work within them is the creation of

"the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). That which unites them is the fact that God is the Friend of each one of them. Their common friendship with God makes them true friends with one another.

This peace in the church is a fact. It is just as true that there is peace among all the different kinds of members of Christ's Body as it is true that each one has peace with God in Christ. The angels declared it to be true, whether we can see it or not, whether it is our experience or not. Believe the angels! Or better yet, believe the God who sent the angels and gave them their song to sing.

Everyone of the epistles the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write to different local congregations began with a benediction which includes "peace from God." The apostle Paul, when he penned these words, not only wanted to make it clear that he was acknowledging the fact that the congregation of saints to which he was writing had peace from God, but he was also praying that God their Father would give the blessing of peace to these churches. The frequency of this acknowledgment and of this petition implies that it is of utmost importance that the members of the church live and practice peace. It also implies that there is a need for this constant reminder that the members of the congregation must strive to live and practice peace with God and with each other; for not always is this evident in the life of the congregation.

The fact of peace must be seen and should be practiced in the church.

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Peace is expected in the church. Peace is expected in every local church.

The importance of living in and practicing peace is evidenced by the numerous commands calling the saints to live in peace. "Seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14 & I Pet. 3:11). "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6). We are admonished to "follow the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19). We are told that "God hath called us to peace" (I Cor. 7:15). "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body" (Col. 3:15). "Be at peace among yourselves" (I Thess. 5:13). "Follow peace with them that call on the Lord with a pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22). "Follow peace with all men" (Heb. 12:14). Two women are specifically told to cease their division and to "be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2).

There may be some who are of a more irenic spirit than others. But no one is exempt from obedience to these commands. Even those who are given to a temper and to a most pugnacious nature must strive to obey these admonitions for peace, as they thank God for the peace He has made with them in Christ.

All who are the objects of God's grace have had their evil, old natures crucified in the death of their Savior and Lord. They have been given, not only a soft heart of flesh, but also the Spirit whose fruit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance."

*The covenant of God
is defined as
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Those in a covenant
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should be friendly,
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on earth!*

The Savior has given His saved ones entrance into the covenant, which

God calls "my covenant of peace" (Num. 25:12). The covenant of God is defined as the relationship of friendship and fellowship. Those in a covenant so defined should be friendly, the friendliest people on earth!

The citizens of the kingdom of Christ live constantly in the consciousness that God has made peace for them. They are not only peaceful and peace loving, but they are "peacemakers."

Salvation means that a person is made to be one with Christ, to be a member of His Body. This union with Christ and with those in Christ is performed by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore the saved ones are admonished to endeavor (make absolutely every effort) "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Nothing is more beautiful than believers pursuing peace with one another. And nothing is more ugly than strife, hatred, and evil motives in the church. It is more than ugly; it is "carnal" (I Cor. 3:3).

The fruit of not endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is not good. One sad consequence is a lack of one's personal possession of peace. But a more serious repercussion is what happens to the church's witness to the world. Her light is hid under a bushel and her Father which is in heaven is not glorified (cf. Matt. 5:16). Occasion is given to the adversary to speak reproachfully and for the name of God to be blasphemed. Her teachings are considered not worth learning and heeding. What a deplorable witness!

The pursuit of peace is not to be at any price, or peace for the sake of peace. Remember that the angels sang also of the glory of God. The clear implication is that peace in the church and the glory of God are in perfect accord. There are wolves (both from without as well as from within—the latter come in sheep's clothing) who seek to destroy the church and her peace. For the glory of God the church must fight against these wolves. For the glory of God it is sometimes absolutely necessary that there be re-formation. This is only an

apparent destruction of the peace of the church. It cannot be called schism. Peace stands on the foundation of the truth. Therefore, the church on earth is militant; she fights.

*There is a right way
and a wrong way
to swing the sword
of the Spirit.*

However, the manner in which the church and her members are militant must reflect the honor of the truth. Let everyone who says that he has peace with God in Christ fight the necessary battles for the truth in an honorable manner. The defense of the truth is never permission for malice, spite, revenge, and vindictiveness. It is in times of war and in the heat of the battle, that the basest parts of man's nature manifest themselves. Unadulterated pride and hatred are heard sometimes in what is said. But also they are seen in *how* things are said. It is a great shame when the doctrines of sovereign grace are defended in a manner completely lacking in grace. Especially in the defense of the truth, the people of God must fight honorably. There is a right way and a wrong way to swing the sword of the Spirit.

Careful distinctions must be made. For the sake of the peace which Christ obtained at the cost of His own life, it is necessary that believers make distinctions. Some battles must be fought or the truth is compromised. There are other battles which should not be fought. Often issues arise within the church which create division. No, the issue does not create the division, the people on the varying sides of the issue create the division. There are disagreements among members of the same congregation or denomination over non-confessional matters, or matters treated in the confessions but which are open to some difference of interpretation. The problem often is that the saints on both sides exalt the issue to one of defense of the truth;

and, of course, their side is defending the truth. It is absolutely necessary that each member of Christ's Body not let these minor matters of difference divide the Body. How truly vile is the purposeful lack of greeting as members of that Body walk together into a worship service. "There should be no schism in the body" (I Cor. 12:25).

*Issues may divide,
but they may never
cause strife.*

Always the one who has peace with God must endeavor (make every possible effort) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. His speech must "be alway with grace" (Col. 4:6). Each servant of the Lord is answerable to the Lord alone; "to his own Master he standeth or falleth."

What a terrible thing if we judge our brother and treat him as our adversary or enemy when "yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

Personalities may never be allowed to interfere. No issue may create hatred. The children of God may disagree, but they may never be disagreeable. Never, not any time, not even in battle, may anything be "done through strife." Issues may divide, but they may never cause strife. Rather the spirit of each peacemaker (Jesus does not allow us to put off that title at any time) is that "in lowliness of mind...each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others," being "likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2-4).

Peace is not experienced in the church without striving. Let the striving be that each put down himself. Let the striving be after the fruit of the

Spirit. Let the striving be after reconciliation of fellow-members of the Body of Christ. Let the striving be to keep the unity of the Spirit. Let the striving be the putting away of "bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking." Let the striving be in being "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31,32).

We are in the season of commemorating the birth of Him who is not only our Savior, but also the Prince of our peace with God. May our commemoration be sincere. May we hear the angels sing. May we reflect on the wonder of the peace our Savior gives. May our commemoration of the peace He brought be evidenced in our attitude and conduct one with another in His Body. May we forgive as forgiven, and pray for forgiveness as we forgive. Then may the peace of God, which passeth all human understanding, dwell within you. □

Christmas and World Peace

Prof. Robert Decker

As always, so again this year, there is all kinds of talk at Christmas time of world peace. The citizens of this land will be urged to follow the example of Jesus and work for peace on earth. Many preachers, the vast majority in fact, will be telling their congregations that Jesus, the great Prince of Peace, is the only hope for peace on earth. These preachers will be exhorting their congregations to pray for world peace.

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What these preachers and their followers ignore, or perhaps we should say reject, is the word of Jesus recorded in Matthew 10:34: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

There are some statements in Scripture which capture in just a few words the entire truth. This is one of those. The Savior is speaking about His purpose in coming to this earth. This is not the only such statement from our Lord. He tells us elsewhere, for example, that He is come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Or again, Jesus tells us that He is come to seek and to save that

which was lost. We must not, therefore, conceive of this word of Jesus as an exhaustive definition of what He came to do on this earth.

This word does, however, get at the heart of the Savior's purpose. Jesus came to save His people from their sins by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Thus Jesus fulfilled the eternal counsel of God; and in Him and His Body, the church, the glory of God shall be perfectly manifest in the New Creation. But all this is accomplished in the way of Christ coming not to send peace on earth but a sword.

The meaning of this word is obvious. Jesus did not come to send

peace on earth, He came to send a sword. Jesus came to send conflict, war, battle. He came to cause division. According to the context, Jesus came to set people at variance, the son against his father, the daughter against her mother.

Is there a contradiction here? "I am not come to send peace but a sword" appears to be the exact opposite of what the Bible says elsewhere concerning Jesus. When they announce His birth the angels speak of "peace on earth and good will among men." In the ninth chapter of His prophecy, Isaiah lists among Jesus' names "The Prince of Peace." Ephesians 2:14-15 teaches that Christ is our peace, that He made both one, that He broke down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity between us, making one new man out of two and so making peace. And in Luke 1:79 Zacharias sings of Him as He who came to "guide our feet into the way of peace." But here Jesus states emphatically, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword." How must we understand this? How can Jesus be "The Prince of Peace" if He came to send not peace on earth, but a sword?

There is of course no contradiction. This statement of Jesus is precisely according to the eternal counsel of God. God's eternal purpose in Christ according to which He saves His church out of the world is: war, division, strife, a sword!

God spoke of this immediately after the fall of man into sin when He announced to Satan, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). God said there is going to be hatred between the two seeds: that of the woman which is the elect church and that of the serpent which is the reprobate world. Between these two there is war, division, strife. The first instance of this soon followed when Cain slew his righteous brother, Abel.

The Bible from this point on records the history of that great battle. Enoch, the seventh from Adam,

*Wherever God's cause
is manifest in the world
there is division, strife.*

prophesied of the imminent judgment of the ungodly and was translated that he should not see death. Noah for one hundred twenty years preached righteousness. Nimrod and the unbelieving world after the flood built their tower of Babel in defiance of God and His cause. The patriarchs were strangers in a strange land. It was the children of Israel in Egypt's bondage. It was the heathen of Canaan against God's chosen people. It was the whole world: Assyria, Syria, and Babylon, against God's Israel. Wherever God's cause is manifest in the world there is division, strife.

The climax came in the fullness of time when God sent His Son into the world. The sword was obvious already at His birth when Herod attempted to destroy Him, and it continued all through the ministry of Christ. Wherever Jesus appeared there was the sword. He was tempted of Satan. He was contradicted, denied, and rejected. Always there was the deliberate attempt to destroy the cause of God.

That became most clearly evident at the cross of Jesus. There the whole world cried, crucify Him, crucify Him! But, it was at the cross that the Prince of Peace crushed the head of the seed of the serpent. There Christ destroyed him that had the power of death. And in the resurrection of Jesus, death was swallowed up in victory.

Even though the issue had been decided, the battle continued after the ascension and return of Christ in the Spirit. If church tradition be correct, only one of the apostles died in bed. By means of false teachers in the church, by means of the temptations of the world, the devil and his host opposed the gospel and attempted to destroy the cause of Jesus Christ and His church.

This battle rages even within the

lives of the children of God. It is the struggle between the old man of sin (the flesh) and the new man in Christ. The apostle Paul's anguished confession of his own struggle against sin recorded in Romans 7 is testimony enough.

There is, therefore, no contradiction. Jesus is indeed the Prince of Peace! But this is not the peace of which the world speaks. Jesus did not come to send peace on earth. The gospel of Jesus is not one of earthly peace and tranquility for all peoples of the earth. The message of Christianity is not one of reconciliation and harmony, or even one of co-existence among the peoples of this world. And the message of Jesus is not one of union between church and world, light and darkness.

*By His cross
Jesus brings
the peace of
the kingdom of heaven
to His people.*

Christ came to send a sword. He came to fight and destroy the ungodly. So God purposed from all eternity. According to the prophecy of Daniel Jesus is the stone cut out of the mountain by no human hand which grinds to powder the kingdoms of this world. Jesus dealt the death-blow at the cross! The cross of Jesus is the destruction of the forces of unbelief under Satan. And the Word of the cross destroys the antichristian wisdom of this world. By His cross Jesus brings the peace of the kingdom of heaven to His people.

Peace on earth? Yes, it is coming. Already in the very recent past we have seen startling evidences of this peace in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. There will soon be peace on earth. But it will not be the peace of Jesus. It will be the peace of Antichrist and his kingdom of darkness. The unbelievable manifestation of sin in our time: the homosexuality, the

lawlessness, the frightening apostasy in the church, all these are indications that there are already many antichrists in the world.

When THE antichrist comes, God's saints will be able neither to buy nor to sell. God's church will be persecuted, harassed, and His saints

slain with the sword. But in that last great battle they are more than conquerors through Jesus. After only a little while the Prince of Peace will return on the clouds to destroy all His enemies and to take all His saints into the new heaven and earth. Then there will be perfect peace in Jesus for the

saints of all ages. God's glory will shine perfectly and forever.

Come, Lord Jesus, yes, come quickly is the prayer of every child of God at Christmas time and all the time. □

Book Review

Satan, His Motives and Methods, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990, 143 pp., \$7.95, (paper). [Reviewed by Pastor Arie den Hartog.]

This book is a reprint. It was originally published in 1919. The author of the book, Lewis Sperry Chafer, was an American Presbyterian clergyman (1871-1952). He was the founder of what today is Dallas Theological Seminary. He was president of Dallas and professor of systematic theology there until his death.

This is a well-written book on a subject that is certainly in need of study. Though it was written a number of years ago it is still just as relevant today. We live in the day of the prevalence of Satanism and the occult. Even more seriously we see Satan working in the church through the deception of false doctrine. We see the works of Satan in so much that has the "form of godliness but denies its power." We witness the works of Satan in the rising power of the man of sin and the ever-growing influence of the "Satanic System" of this ungodly world.

The excellence of this book is that it is written from a scholarly and conservative perspective and that it is solidly biblical. As the author says in the beginning of the book, all his source material on the truth of Satan is taken directly from the Bible and from the Bible alone. The book is absolutely full of biblical quotations. The sheer abundance of biblical references impresses one with the fact that God's Word has so much to warn us about

Satan. We need to know the devil's person, and his evil motives and purposes. Much that is written today about Satan includes so many extra-biblical and even pagan ideas about Satan. We need to know what the Bible has to say about Satan.

The author affirms the reality of Satan in all of his fearful power and great wickedness and writes soberly about him. Many today, even among those who are in the church, imagine Satan to be little more than a mythological being concerning whom you can make cartoons and about whom you can laugh without fear or seriousness. The very minimizing and denying of his reality in the modern-day church plays right into the hands of Satan.

In the first chapter Chafer gives a brief summary of the career of Satan, including his creation and fall, the various stages in the history of his operation, and his final defeat. Chafer shows from Scripture that Satan was created by God as a good angel and is therefore absolutely dependent on God in all of his operations. Though Satan is powerful and fearful, God is sovereign over him. There are chapters with titles such as the following: The Satanic Host, Satan's Motive, Satan's Methods, The Man of Sin, Satan's Modern Devices, and the Believer's Present Victory.

It would be easy to give many examples of excellent points made in each of these chapters. Chafer emphasizes that Satan's works are not limited to what, even to the world, seems horribly depraved, devilish, and blatantly wicked. Satan has great spiritual power to influence the great

and cultured and refined of the world. He has a great system of influence in modern-day culture and philosophy and education. He is the author of much modern-day religion that calls itself Christian and that is so highly regarded by men but condemned by the holy and righteous God. Especially good is Chafer's discussion of what is really involved in religion that has the form of godliness and denies the power of it. This religion is Satan-inspired though it appears to be godly. It is a religion that teaches man the vain imagination that he can save himself with only a little help from God. It is a religion that speaks of Christ as a great example for all men to follow but denies the truth of the atonement as the only hope of man's salvation. Throughout the book, and especially in the last chapter, there is an emphasis on the fact that Satan is so powerful and so deceptive in his devices that it is totally impossible for the Christian to stand against him in his own strength and wisdom. We are absolutely dependent on the grace of God and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to gain the victory over Satan. And we shall by that grace indeed have the victory. The defeat of Satan which has been prophesied from the beginning is absolutely sure. Christ's final victory has been guaranteed by the cross and resurrection.

We recommend this book. It has one great weakness that must, in our opinion, be pointed out. It is dispensational in its perspective, and that does seriously affect some of the interpretation of Scripture presented in it. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

We begin this latest installment of the "News" with an item of interest from the South Holland, IL PR Christian School.

When school started this fall, both the 5th and 6th graders began saving their own money for the purpose of collecting \$50 for people in Russia who do not have Bibles in their homes. It took about a month before enough money was saved and sent on to the Trinitarian Bible Society.

After six weeks the students received a letter from the TBS thanking them for their generosity. The letter said, in part, something of which I think we can all be reminded: "Children, I hope you may realize what privileges that you have, that you have Bibles. Be sure you read them every day, and pray about what you have read, that God may apply it to your heart."

Evangelism Highlights

The semi-annual Protestant Reformed Evangelism Planning (PREP) Committee meeting was held on November 9 in our Byron Center, MI PRC. All persons interested in the evangelism work of our churches were invited to attend.

The Council of the South Holland, IL PRC has approved their church's Evangelism Committee's recommendation that the preaching services in Ft. Wayne be discontinued

at the end of November unless there were sufficient new grounds for continuing. The bi-weekly Bible Study will continue until its review in March.

While Rev. Russ Dykstra, of our Doon, IA PRC, was in Boise, ID preaching for the Sovereign Redeemer Fellowship, he also arranged to give a public lecture on the doctrine of creation.

The annual Reformed Witness Committee Fall Lecture was held on November 15 at Dordt College Chapel in Sioux Center, IA. Prof. David Engelsma spoke on the topic, "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History." Members of the three congregations (Doon and Hull, IA, and Edgerton, MN) were encouraged to pass the word and invite their friends and family members to attend this very important lecture.

Also concerning Dordt College, let me add here that the R.W.C. continues to support a Bible Study on the Dordt College Campus. The Bible Study is treating this year the first eleven chapters of Genesis as well.

Congregational Highlights

Many of our churches sponsor lectures to correspond with the anniversary of the Reformation in October. One of our churches who did that was the congregation of the Pella PRC in Pella, IA. They invited Rev. Steve Key, of the Randolph, WI PRC, to be the speaker. He spoke on the subject, "Church Membership in an Evil Age."

The December 15th, 1990 issue of the *Standard Bearer* contained an item dealing with plans by the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to add a double-wing addition to their building. One side would provide classroom space while the other would serve as a social room. These additions would make it possible to remove rooms which have been added to the sides of the sanctuary, making much needed

additional seating possible. Well, after some delays, construction at last began on this ambitious project in late October.

The Council of the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL has been informed by the pastor of the Ascension Lutheran Church, which facility they use for their evening services, that Bethel will not be able to use the facility beyond March, 1992. So the search begins, for Bethel, to find another facility in which to meet.

The young people of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA sponsored a Thanksgiving Hymnsing after the evening service on Sunday, November 24. There were several special numbers and an offering was taken for the coming Young People's Convention sponsored next year by Faith Church in Jenison, MI.

Denominational Activities

Rev. M. Kamps, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI was asked by the Contact Committee to represent our churches at NAPARC, North America Presbyterian and Reformed Council of Churches. This meeting was held November 6 and 7 in Pittsburgh, PA.

The Fall Ladies' League Meeting was held October 22 in the Doon, IA PRC. Rev. R. Dykstra spoke on the topic "The Particular Task of Godly Women in the Last Times."

We send our congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. C. Terpstra of South Holland on the occasion of the birth of a son, Justin Charles, born October 25.

Ministerial Calls

Rev. C. Haak declined the call he had received to serve as pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI.

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

He is Our Peace

*Was ever there a peace like that
In Eden found —
When God for disobedience' sake
First cursed the ground
And gave the man a life of endless toil,
The woman, sorrow
In the bearing of their seed?
What deep relief,
That Justice, Merciful
Already had put enmity
Between the stricken pair
And Satan, for eternity.*

*Was ever there a peace like that
In Bethlehem-town,
When jubilant messengers from Heaven
Brought their anthems down
To shepherds tending flocks upon her lonely
hills?
From heaven to earth
Their "glorias" did resound
To hail the virgin birth.
"To men of God's good will
The Savior now descends."
Long had the prophet-mantles lain unused,
But now the waiting ends.*

*Was ever there a peace like that
At Jesus' tomb,
When women, coming to embalm their Lord
With grief and gloom,
Found stone rolled back and angel bidding,
"Come,
Behold the place"?
Not there, but risen now.
From Death's embrace
Torn free forevermore,
That He might lead a captive band
From death to life with Him,
And rule with them at God's right hand.*

*Was ever there a peace like that
In hearts of men
Who bear a living hope that He shall come
To earth again,
And sing for joy to hear His footsteps now?
Four horsemen run,
And there is war and death and woe.
But there is One,
Who rides before them all
To lead us where all sorrows cease,
And lion dwells with lamb.
Come quickly, Lord, our Prince of Peace!*

Suzanne Looyenga
South Holland, Illinois