

PORTRAITS OF THE SAVIOUR

Lk.2:8-13

The Bible is a photo album of God's Son.

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Beholding Jesus as the Babe of Bethlehem

Never has there been a birth like Jesus', nor will there ever be. His birth is a holy mystery. The prophet Isaiah predicted His birth 750 years before its actual occurrence. Isa. 7:14, ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."***

The Announcement

An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, announcing: ***"Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins"*** (Matt.1:20-21).

The angelic announcement to Joseph is taken straight out of Isaiah. Immanuel, which means God with us, would be named Jesus.

The Arrival

The angel, speaking to the shepherds, said: ***"Do not be afraid. I bring good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"*** (Lk.2: 8-13).

Then suddenly a throng of heavenly angels praised God, saying, ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."***

Although Jesus' conception was a miracle, His birth came by the normal process of labor. God chose the young, poor virgin Mary to give birth to His Son. And although Mary had a sinful nature, Jesus would not be contaminated by it. His sinless conception is the mystery of godliness and the power of God.

John 1:1, 2, 3, 14 makes it perfectly clear who the child was, stating: ***"The Word was Godthe Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

That little babe in Bethlehem, who was unable to take care of Himself, was God Himself, Creator of all. As Charles Wesley writes:

***Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as Man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel!***

The incarnation of God, in the person of Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. The superstructure of Christian theology is built on it. If we chose to reject the virgin birth and the divinity of the Savior, we reject everything else about Him.

Jesus Himself said to the Pharisees of his day, "***I am from above; I am not of this world***" (John 8:23).

That holy night was the night of nights! Divinity put on humanity. The invisible God became visible. The untouchable God became touchable. The eternal Son of God put on flesh and became the Son of Man. The High King of heaven became a baby.

But we must not make a serious mistake by taking a quick glance at the photo of his birth. We must thoughtfully focus in on the snapshot of his birth. We can't afford to miss the reason for His coming to earth.

The snapshot of His humble birth in the smelly, dirty surroundings of a stable, demands much contemplation. It is a picture of Almighty God lowering Himself, stooping down into a guilt-ridden world that is dark and cold, and filled with the stench of sin.

Like a jeweler displays the brilliance of a diamond by placing it on a black cloth for its brilliance to stand out; so too was the splendor of God's love displayed against the blackness of sin, and filth of the flesh, in the person of his Son, who came to be clothed in human form.

Sin is the ugliness of Christmas. Sin is the black and white picture of Christmas with all its colors removed. Sin stands behind the scene and is the reason for the Savior's coming. The spotlight of Christmas is found in 1Tim.1:15: "***Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.***"

The holy baby was destined to become the Savior of the world and take away the sins of those who would believe in Him. Over that tiny cradle, loomed the cross.

Beholding Jesus as a Young Boy

There is only one snapshot to be found during the years of His obscurity—that period from His infancy to His manhood. The period of obscurity is when he worked covertly making wooden tables, chairs and doors. Read Lk. 2:41-47.

At the age of 12 we see a portrait of Jesus, baffling the most intelligent minds of His day. He was a common kid with uncommon words.

In vs. 48-49 His reply to His mother's question, "***Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you***" is answered with: "***Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?***"

With that answer, Jesus is affirming His Sonship by calling God His Father. This meant that He had clear awareness of His identity and mission. The act marked a transition. Jesus was moving from responsibility to His earthly parents to responsibility to God.

V52 –And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.

As a growing boy, His development is seen in four levels: the physical, the intellectual, the moral and the spiritual.

Beholding Jesus as the God-Man

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' portrait is that of the Messiah -King. Mark's gospel portrays Him as the Suffering Servant of God, while Luke's portrays Him as the Model Man. In John's gospel the portrait is that of Jesus the Divine Son.

Let's take Mark's gospel for a moment and view pictures of Jesus as the tireless servant of God. We'll see Him as God and Man at the same time. In Mark we see Him tired, sleepy, hungry, and tempted as we are. But we also see Him as the great miracle-worker.

Mark's "captured moments" of the marvelous life of Jesus on earth, are vivid, colorful, graphic and breathtaking.

In the first chapter, we see Jesus casting out demons and healing a demoniac. Here, He displays His almighty power over evil spirits.

Again, in the same chapter, we see Jesus healing a leper. Here, He displays the removal of sin's disgusting defilement.

In the second chapter, we see Jesus healing a paralytic. Here, He displays the deliverance from the bondage of sin.

In the third chapter, we see Jesus healing a man with a shriveled hand. Here, by restoring the hand, He displays the enablement that He gives man to work for Him.

In the fourth chapter, we see Jesus stopping the waves and silencing the wind. Here, He displays his power over the forces of nature.

In the fifth chapter, we see Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. Here, He displays his power over death.

In the sixth chapter, we see Jesus multiplying the fish and loaves. Here, He displays He is the Living Bread, and the satisfaction that He alone, brings to the hungry soul.

Moreover, in the same chapter, we see Jesus walking on water. Here, He displays divine law dominating natural law.

In the ninth chapter, we see Jesus on a mountain, transfigured and glorified. Here, He displays His heavenly Glory.

In the tenth chapter, we see Jesus healing two blind men. Here, He displays the illumination that He brings to darkened souls. He is the Light of the world.

In the eleventh chapter, we see Jesus cursing a fig tree and making it wither. Here, He displays the destiny of those who persist in their unfruitfulness.

For three and a half years He demonstrated all kinds of proof of who He really was. Nonetheless, when the time came for people to accept or reject His claims as Messiah, as King, as Son of God, the verdict was against Him. They sought his assassination.

John 19 presents us with a snapshot of Jesus at His trial before the Supreme Court of Rome. Pilate twice tells Jesus' accusers ***"He has done nothing that deserves death"***, as he seeks to have Him punished and released. After the beatings Pilate said to the crowds, ***"Behold the man."*** Look at this poor fellow! Hasn't he suffered enough? Then, in mockery, he went on to say, ***"Behold the King!"***

Pilate was hoping that the spectacle of this man (Jesus) disfigured and disabled by severe flogging, dressed in a purple kingly robe, and crowned with thorns; would satisfy His accusers.

He believed that the accusers would feel that Jesus had learned His lesson and that He no longer posed a threat. That they would take pity and have Him released. But, the chief priests and other foes were not pacified. Actually, they became even more enraged. In a deafening fury, they yelled, ***"Crucify him! Crucify Him!"*** Then, He was savagely led off to be crucified.

Beholding Jesus as the Dying Savior

In Is. 53:5-6, 10, we find a portrait etched in eternity, of the Savior, who would be our sin-bearer.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When you make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

He died for our sins. He was our substitute on the cross. Have you trusted Him for your salvation? Have you repented of your sins? He died that we might live.

The crucifixion of the Savior was not an accident. It didn't take God by surprise. It was God ordained. Acts 2:23 tells us, "***that the man Christ Jesus was handed by God's set purpose and foreknowledge ; and with the help of wicked men was put to death by nailing Him to the cross.***

John 3:16 –***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

Beholding Jesus as Empowering Lord

Jesus not only died on the cross; He rose from the dead. He is alive! And now He takes up residence in the hearts of all His people, loving us, empowering us, enabling us to live righteous lives before Him.

The message of Christmas is really not about presents, it is about "His presence".

The living, empowering Lord within us, enables us to bear testimony to the gospel of His saving love. His presence in us, allows us to trust Him to provide for our every need. It allows us to be radically devoted to Him –to live lives different from the people around us. He enables us to love the unlovable, to do the impossible and forgive continually.

Beholding Jesus as Final Judge and Returning King

At His first coming, many proclaimed the man Jesus, their King, by spreading out "*the red carpet of royalty*" with their cloaks and palm branches. And, by hailing and shouting, "***Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!***"

But the religious leaders, the political authorities, and the majority of the common folks rejected His claims as Messiah-King. But, this same Jesus, Creator yet infant, crucified yet raised, will return! And when He returns, He will come not as a weak, helpless infant, but as the final judge of all mankind.

“Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him. So shall it be! Amen (Rev. 1:7).”

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We have a majestic portrait of the future Messiah –King by John the Apostle, in Rev. 19:11-16—“***I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war.The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written:***

“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” ”

This is a very different picture of Jesus, isn't it?

The glory of God turned an ordinary barn into a little piece of heaven that first Christmas night. This still happens today whenever Jesus is received. The glory of God fills that soul. Have you let Him in and received Him? Has He come to indwell you? Or do you refuse Him entrance to the room of your heart, just like He was refused that night in the inn of Bethlehem?

Our God is a God who loves to save. He will never turn away anyone who calls upon Him. If you still haven't surrendered your life to Him, do so TODAY, before it is too late!!! The Christmas message is a message of salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God. It is the indescribable gift of His Son to each one of us, if we would have Him.

Make room for Christ in your heart, if you haven't already so. Allow Him to come in and fill it with Heaven's glory! By giving Him the room of your heart, a second birth will take place. A new birth for you –that will usher in a new and blessed life, full of hope, glory and inexpressible joy!