

E-Herald of the Coming Kingdom

"The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near.
Change the way you think and act, and believe the Good News."
Mark 1:15 GW

In This Issue:

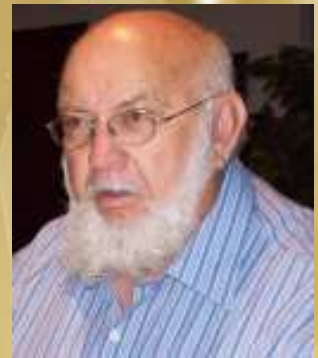
**The Last Hurrah Of An Ancient Empire
Changes Are Not Always Welcome
Remembering at Christmas
Christmas Is Coming
The Gift Of The Magi
Reasonable, Reachable & Realistic Resolutions
Where Is Your Umbrella?**

**DEDICATED TO SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S COMING
KINGDOM TO BE ESTABLISHED WHEN JESUS RETURNS**



EDITOR'S NOTE

Co-Editors: Kent Ross - Wally Winner



What's Our Purpose?

Truth is still misunderstood and incorrect understandings are still being propounded. It is disastrous to realize the state of confusion that describes the theological world. Though many students at seminary level know what is true, they cannot proclaim it except privately

The concept of "the trinity" has no basis in the Bible, is not sound doctrine, is not rational and whose strongest defenders have to fall back on it being a mystery. Even in its formation there is no clear comprehension of how they arrived at their conclusion. They couldn't express it in clear words and struggled through several councils, over many years and still could only conclude it by a majority vote and the banning of all dissenters.

Neither is the concept of the immortality of the soul founded on sound doctrine found is corroborating Scripture. It is admittedly platonic in origin and was not found in the Old Testament, but grew as even the Jewish world, in part was increasingly influenced by Hellenism.

The same is true of the concept of going to heaven at death, and the loss of the Kingdom. Isn't it curious that even in our Lord's Model Prayer, Jesus taught us all to pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth . . . as it is in heaven. Ignoring what the writer of Hebrews said about the wonderful Old Testament people of faith not having received their reward because God planned something better so that they without us would not be made perfect.

If that is also not our reason for existence, then whose is it?
If Not Us, Who? If Not Now, When?

Year of Evangelism

To what is the Church called? Defenders of Truth? Yes. Builders of Buildings? Yes, as needed. Education? Yes. Praise? Certainly, but there is more.

Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of the coming Kingdom . . . and leading others to understanding it and placing their faith in Jesus, the Son of God. This is followed by immersion as a public testimony of what is an inward experience.

But "evangelism" must be more than a program we bring out and promote some years. We've had "Enlarging Our Tents," which was commendable and challenging. We once stressed "Each One Reach One" and that was to the point, but . . . BUT . . .

It shouldn't be a "Year of Evangelism" but an ongoing experience of the life of every Christian. Some advocated the Four Spiritual Laws some years ago, but it was almost immediately rejected as not complete. We then offered one called "Six Steps," which was excellent. Some advocated "The Roman Road," and this was sneered down as not having quite the right mix. With much of the criticism I could concur.

What I didn't like and what I don't like is when we reject the use of something in preference to not using anything! The result has been a lack of growth in our churches with the continued weakness of being unable to do together what is a struggle to do alone. We give for missions, which is good, but we don't do our own missions . . . right in our own Jerusalem's. We send money to send others, but don't go to our own neighbor.

Until Evangelism becomes the center of our efforts, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, we are not fulfilling the proclamation of the Gospel.

This Issue is Filled

The concerns about the Future are again address by Co-Editor Wally Winner in his fascination article on Iran's coming demise. Tracy Zhykhovich shares her deeply personal story with unflinching honesty.

There are three wonderful articles on keeping Christmas in the proper perspective by Dennis Baldwin, Dave Hixon and Scott Ross. Then the New Year's lurks just around the corner and Chuck Jones points us to sensible New Year's "Resolutions?" Finally Dennis Baldwin's article which we wanted to use in November still has a delightful story to tell.

MARANATHA, COME, LORD JESUS



New Clippings
Page 2

The Last Hurrah
Of An Ancient Kingdom
Wally Winner
Page 6

Changes Are Not
Always Welcome
Tracy Zhykhovich
Page 11

Remembering
at Christmas
Dennis Baldwin
Page 15

Christ is Coming
David Hixson
Page 17

The Gifts of the Magi
Scott Ross
Page 20

Reasonable, Reachable &
Realistic Resolutions
Chuck Jones
Page 23

Where is Your Umbrella?
Dennis Baldwin
Page 25



News
Clippings

Feds Cut Rehab Center Funding Because of Bible Reading

Two Colorado Women's shelters lost government funding for their successful substance abuse programs because part of the process of turning the lives around of these women was reading the Bible. In addition to dealing with substance abuse problems, the shelters "provide transitional housing for the homeless and those struggling with addiction."

Everything the government says it likes to see happen in these types of shelters the directors were doing and doing well. But it was that Bible reading thing that got in the way. So no more funding. It was OK to support organizations like Acorn and other needless and politically motivated organizations but not these rehab centers.

Bob Holmes, the executive director of Homeward Pikes Peak, the agency that helps disseminate the \$1.88 million in HUD money that is allocated each year said that "HUD is very, very, very strict, very unequivocal, about programs have to be of a secular nature."

Islamist Groups Leading in Egypt's Parliamentary Elections

Christians Fear Mistreatment Could Increase By Dan Wooding

CAIRO, EGYPT (ANS) — Compass Direct News (CDN) is reporting that Islamist groups made a strong showing this week in the first stages of Egypt's parliamentary elections, according to figures released today by elections officials, renewing concerns Christians have about their future in the country.

CDN said that The Freedom and Justice Party, affiliated with the once-banned Muslim Brotherhood, won 40 percent of the vote overall. The Al Nour Party, made up of members of the extremist Salafi group, garnered 20 percent of the vote. By comparison, the relatively liberal Egypt Social Democratic Party received 15 percent of the total vote.

"The candidates were campaigning for 112 seats, but the total number of seats allocated from this round of voting will not be known until after a run-off election on Monday (Dec. 5)," said the CDN story. "The election results confirmed the fears of Egyptian Christians, many of whom believe that Islamists will take control of the country in the wake of the revolution that deposed former President Hosni Mubarak.

Christian Leader Shot Dead in Pakistan in Suspected Islamist Attack

By Jeremy Reynolds - Senior Correspondent for ASSIST News Service

A leading figure in the Christian community has been shot dead in Pakistan, having previously received death threats.

According to a news release from the Barnabas Fund, Jameel Sawan, a preacher, evangelist and champion of minority rights, was gunned down in Karachi on Nov. 16. He was a city businessman, but spent a lot of his time pastoring Christians and sharing the Gospel with Muslims.

The Barnabas Fund said Sawan had also been a close aide to Saleem Khursheed Khokhar, who is chairman of the Standing Committee on Minorities Affairs in the Sindh Assembly and president of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance in Sindh.

Both men had received death threats from Muslim extremists because of their involvement in campaigning for minority rights and support for policies initiated by the assassinated Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti.

Turkey: Christians Minister to Van Earthquake Victims

By Dan Wooding – Founder of ASSIST Ministries

Christian organisations including Elam Ministries (www.elam.com) are providing relief to the victims of the devastating earthquake which hit the Turkish city of Van on October 23, 2011.

An example was a woman survivor pulled from the rubble. The city was also hit by a second earthquake on November 9, 2011. Thousands were left homeless, while over 600 people lost their lives.

Van, which is home to a large number of Iranian refugees, contains an Iranian Christian church which was founded by Elam. This church is the first Christian church in Van for 100 years.

Christian Human Rights Group Highlights Plight of Papuan People On 50th Anniversary Of Independence

By Dan Wooding - Founder of ASSIST Ministries

PAPUA, INDONESIA (ANS) — A UK-based Christian human rights group, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) says that it “remains deeply concerned at the plight of the Papuan people following reports of an alleged crackdown by Indonesian military and police on religious ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of West Papuan independence from the Dutch.”

The anniversary was marked around the region by religious ceremonies, including the raising of the Papuan “Morning Star” flag, a symbol of independence.

The Reverend Socratez Sofyan Yoman, Chairman of the Alliance of Papuan Baptist Churches, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that several people taking part in flag-raising ceremonies have been shot and others arrested by Indonesian security forces.

He stated, “We are here. How can they do this? We are the owners of this land. How can these outside people, these outside people be coming in and killing, arrest and torture us continually?”

CSW says that according to media reports, in one religious ceremony in Timika Indah field, four civilians were allegedly shot by police after the raising of the “Morning Star” flag. The four victims are currently alive and undergoing treatment at hospital, according to a local source. The commander of the Military Command in West Papua has denied the reports.

News of this crackdown comes just over a month after the Indonesian regime brutally suppressed peaceful demonstrations at the Papuan People’s Congress on October 19, killing six people.

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “The ongoing and brutal suppression of peaceful protests in West Papua is a clear violation of the human rights of the Papuan people to freedom of assembly, expression and religion. CSW is concerned about rising tensions in West Papua and increased police brutality.

“We urge the international community to facilitate a meaningful dialogue between the Indonesian government and the Papuan people, with the help of international mediation, and to encourage the Indonesia, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council and Chairman of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), to uphold the rule of law and protect human rights in West Papua.”

The Last Hurrah Of An Ancient Empire

By Wally Winner



“The Iranian nation ... will not retreat one iota in the face of oppressing powers... The Iranian nation has chosen its path.” Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Iran is always in the news making threats against Israel and the USA, but recently the British Embassy in Tehran was overrun. Security was threatened and all British diplomats were ordered to return home. Great Britain then closed the Iranian Embassy in London and expelled the Iranian counterparts.

The United States continues to monitor the nuclear progress and potential of Iran. In recent days, the United States military has confirmed that Iran is in possession of a RQ170 SENTINEL stealth drone – the model that was used in the bin Laden raid – which Iran claims it shot down.

Bible prophecy already tells us if Iran’s threats will succeed. Ahmadinejad’s plan to wipe Israel off the map with nuclear weapons will backfire and cause his own people to flee Iran. It’s the next prophecy to be fulfilled and may affect everyone who depends on the flow of Middle East oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

Even though the Iranians are getting nuclear knowledge, aid and man power from North Koreans, the London Times recently reported an explosion causing damage at a nuclear site. Satellite photos show extensive damage at Isfahan which is near Tehran.

In spite of the offers of economic aid and other incentives from the major powers, Iran repeatedly ruled out suspending uranium enrichment. In fact, nuclear material is not difficult to obtain.

Since the breakup of the old Soviet Union former republics Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tadhikistan have had difficult economic times. The one commodity they have that is sought after by a number of countries in the world is nuclear material. Those five former Soviet republics are also Islamic. Where do you think they will find their market?

An added difficulty is the approximate 19,000 warheads from the former Soviet Union that are unaccounted for. Who



has them? Where and when will they be used? We must be concerned about leaders and followers who are not deterred with the possibility of death.

The Russians sent some anti-aircraft systems to Iran to help fend off an attack on their nuclear facilities. Iran already has TOR-M1 surface-to-air missiles from Russia and that an unspecified number of S-300s were on order. The most sophisticated version of the system can track 100 targets at once and fire on planes 120 km (75 miles) away.



Officials agree that the S-300 would compound the challenges that Iran — whose nuclear sites are numerous, distant, and fortified — would already pose for any future air strike campaign.

The Russian government is trying to convince the Chinese government to join them in retaliation against anyone that one attack Iran whether it is the Israel or the United States.

Some forget that this is not fight with the United States, but that Iran is under a United Nations directive (if that means much). It is Resolution 1737 (2006) Adopted by the Security Council at its 5612th meeting, on December 23, 2006.

Seeing the threat for them, Israel has held major military exercises that appeared to be practice for a potential strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. An excess of 100 Israeli F-16 and F-15 fighter jets took part in one exercise over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece.

That practice run also included helicopters, which could be used in rescuing downed pilots, with the helicopters and refueling tankers flying over 900 miles (1,440 kilometers), roughly the same distance between Israel and Iran's uranium enrichment plant at Natanz.

In preparation of any Israeli military strike on its nuclear sites, Iran has been training al-Qaida elements in the Egyptian Sinai desert on how to coordinate retaliatory attacks. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards are used in the training in the Sinai and Gaza Strip to carry out large-scale attacks, including missile attacks, cross-border incursions, suicide bombings and explosions targeting infrastructure, such as oil and gas pipelines. It is part of an Iranian plot to widen any Israeli-Iranian conflict to involve other countries. There is also information Iran has been working with Islamic Salafist groups in Jordan that are allied with al-Qaida.



Any Iranian cooperation with al-Qaida would underscore the dangers of Tehran having nuclear weapons. The country has a history of using terrorist proxies, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon, to carry out its bidding.

So Iran and its nuclear weapons may be a political nightmare and a security problem for the world, but where does this fit into prophecy? Iran is mentioned in the Bible, but under a different name: Persia.

This is the location of one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations dating back to about 4000 B.C. This territory that includes Iran has been part of a larger region in history. At some points the area extended to the Danube River in the west, to the Indus River in the east, from the Caucasus and Caspian Seas in the north to the Persian Gulf and even Egypt in the south.

Peoples and empires that have occupied the property include the Medes, Achaemenid Empire, Greeks, Arabs, Turks and Mongols, Seleucid Empire, Parthians and Sassanids. The Islamic conquest (633-656) eventually absorbed the Persian civilization.

Finally, Iran became an independent state in 1501 with Islam as its official religion. It was a monarchy ruled by a shah until the 1979 Iranian revolution when Iran officially became a republic.

The words Persia, Persian and Persians occur some thirty-five times in the Old Testament. These words occur in only five books of the Old Testament: 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Ezekiel and Daniel. Many of the references deal with the Persian Empire that ruled the world 539 to 331 BC. The first three references are historical information so we will start with Daniel. Daniel's information was prophecy at the time.

One night Nebuchadnezzar had too much Mexican food and was lying around, when he started seeing a vision (Dan. 2:1). At first he probably thought he was hallucinating from the jalapeños. He quickly determined that what he was seeing was important, but didn't have a clue what it meant. He called in his best wise guys and gave them a couple simple instructions. First, they were to give him the content of the dream.

After completing that simple task, he then wanted them to explain its meaning (Dan. 2:5). No p r e s s u r e ! Nebuchadnezzar did not have a very good human rights record. Nevertheless, while holding tight to their heads, they had to confess that it was an impossible task (Dan. 2:10-13). Since heads were going to roll (Dan. 2:13), let's lengthen the line in front of us. So the search began for Daniel and his friends.

After counseling with his friends and praying, Daniel appeared before the king, repeated the dream and gave the interpretation. (Dan. 2:14-45). The dream was about kingdoms and conquerors portrayed in metal and stone. Daniel saw Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold. It is the second kingdom, the chest and arms of silver that concern us right now.



Jump ahead to Daniel five where we usher in the second kingdom.

On Saturday night, October 12, 539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, was throwing a modest little party for a thousand of his closest lords and their families (Dan. 5:1). Right in the middle of all the fun, the fingers from a hand (the Addams family had one called "Thing") began writing on the wall. Usually the children only wrote on the wall, so this caught everybody's attention (Dan. 5:5). The finger wrote "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" which sounds a lot like what Belshazzar did right there on the palace floor (Dan. 5:6).



Daniel was not a party animal at this stage of his life, but apparently a very good sleeper. Somebody had to go get him. Upon his arrival, he looked around and said "Hey, what a mess. By the way, somebody wrote on your wall". He did live up to his billing (Dan. 5:10-13). He promptly translated the message for Belshazzar. The meaning was that God had numbered his kingdom, found it wanting and it would be given to the Medes and the Persians" (Dan. 5:25-29).

That night the empires moved from the head of gold to the chest and arms of silver. In one of the most peaceful changes of empires, armies under the direction of Cyrus brought the empire of the Medes and Persians. Later, most references to the Medes is dropped and history books refer to it as the Persian Empire.

Numerous prophecies were fulfilled when Cyrus' armies took control: in fact, prophecies too numerous to go in to here. A history book, Isaiah chapters 44, 45; Ezra 1:1-3; 2 Chron. 36:22, 23 will reveal what God had prophesied 150 years before the birth of Cyrus came true on one night. Cyrus was working as an agent for God (Isa. 45:1-3). The prophecies are so detailed and were so well known before the fall of Babylon under Cyrus, that it causes tremendous difficulties to those that try to discredit the Bible.

Does the Bible have any "leftover" prophecies for Iran? Maybe something for today? Certainly!

Persia now returns for at least one last round joining a coalition of nations for a surprise attack on Israel. A leader identified as Gog moves a group of nations toward Israel. The text of Ezekiel 38 and 39 seem to indicate that some type of nuclear or contaminating weapons is involved. God intervenes to keep Israel from being obliterated.

Gog is identified as the "chief prince" of the attackers. Gog leads into battle people who come from the list of nations in Genesis 10. (See "When Russia Stretches" in Volume 3, issue 10, October, 2011 of the eHerald for the present day identity of these nations.) Persia (Iran) is from Elam, the first son of Shem.

The text includes several timing clues.

1. It tells us it will be "in the latter years" and "in the latter days" (Ezekiel 38:8, 16 KJV).
2. It has to be after the regathering of Israel to the land (Ezekiel 38:8, 12; 39:27, 28).
3. Israel is living in "unwalled villages" (Ezekiel 38:11KJV). Villages without walls would have been uncommon during Ezekiel's time.

4. The nation of Israel must be “dwelling safely” (Ezekiel 38:11, 14; 39:26). The word used here is “*Betach*”. It is found 162 times in the Old Testament and in 130 cases it means a state of mind. Are we talking about a peace treaty or because Israel feels it can defeat any enemy (Ezekiel 39:26)? It is not just hate that motivates, but a desire for Israel’s wealth (Ezekiel 38:11-13).

The armies are thwarted almost before they get started. The attack itself gets a brief review and the nation of Israel appears to be preserved although the land may have some damage.

The defeat is a supernatural one (Ezekiel 39:2, 3). An earthquake followed by disease, rain, hailstones, and for good measure, fire and brimstone (Ezekiel 38:19, 20, 22). Invading armies are completely destroyed (Ezekiel 39:2).

God is on display here so that His name is glorified. The nation of Israel and the world will have known that He is control.

For the nation of Israel, God secures their future and pours out His spirit on them (Ezekiel 39:22, 29). The cleanup from the conflict takes seven years to clear (Ezekiel 39:9). Somehow it supplies the energy needs of Israel during that time.

Ordinary fire can burn wood. A nuclear fire can burn metal. Another clue that nuclear weapons may be involved here is the use of professionals to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:14). Passer-bys that spot a bone are not to touch it, but to flag it for the professionals to handle (Ezekiel 39:15).

The carnage is so extensive that it will take seven months for the people of Israel to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:12, 13). They do get some help. The bodies provides a feast for animals and birds (Ezekiel 39:17).

When will this battle take place? This particular alignment of nations has not come against Israel in past history. It is yet to come. The possibilities then are:

1. Just before the eternal age
2. Armageddon
3. Part of the last days scenario, but before the last battle.

Although there are similarities in the reference to Gog and Magog just before the eternal age (Revelation 20:7-10), it is the differences that set it apart.

Likewise, the same is true of an Armageddon tie in (Revelation 16:12-16).

There are several parallels. Again, there are enough distinguishing characteristics that seem to eliminate it. That presents us with the final possibility. It is a part of the last days, but not the final battle. Iran (Persia) is ready for a fight. She has convinced some of her allies (a few nations standing around) that she is the innocent one here.

God always finishes what He starts. He began a plan of redemption the included the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. It His Son that will be returning to this earth to set up His Kingdom. Until that day, we have been given many passages of scripture alerting us to what will happen on this earth. God intended for us to study and understand. May we be like the Bereans and search the scriptures so that we are prepared for the future.

Changes Are Not Always Welcome

By Tracy Zhykhovich

I went to Russia twenty years ago. I yearned to share the good news of the coming kingdom with people there who did not have an opportunity to freely hear the Word of God for almost seventy years. I was willing and passionately attempted to do all I could to serve my God and share the good news with these people. I learned, overall, that they did not like change to their religious practices. They felt foreigners were trying to convert them not to the true faith of the Word, but to their individual countries beliefs. And if they were willing to listen, they preferred a large assembly. As many believe even in the United States, if it is big, it must be right and worthy of attending. This was very disheartening. Even so, my heart desired to remain living there and to share with those who would listen and to be an example to those around me. I had a desire and peace to live my life in Russia and be a light. God used many brothers and sisters here in the United States to make this possible. I am humbled by this support and thank God that it was possible to be a light there for so many years. Many seeds were planted, but few grew. I don't know how God will work in the lives of the people I touched, but I was faithful to do what I could do. Others may water those seeds, but only God can make them grow. My heart was broken when I realized that I must leave my home and my people, but I knew it was God's leading and by His grace that I could deal with yet more change.

Changes may not always be welcomed, but they are necessary if we are to become the people God desires us to be. In Scripture we are told to change our ways, to change our thinking, and to change our hearts. We can and should choose to do these things on our own. As a born again believer we ought to be doing this in all areas of our lives on a regular basis. Even when we are doing this, God allows circumstances and people to bring further change into our lives. As a loving Father, He also sends change at times to further our growth or to discipline us, which also hopefully causes the desired growth. Change can be inconvenient, uncomfortable and downright miserable. If we have the right mindset, we will view change as a refining force which can be used to make us stronger and to mold us to be more like Jesus. Our spiritual fruit will ripen and we will be better prepared to be the kings and priests we are to be during the millennium.

Additionally, we will be more able to minister to others today, as God intends.

I have experienced numerous changes throughout my life. God has used them to help me mature in countless ways. Some of the changes I have experienced were by my choice and others were brought about by other people or circumstances. As I look back over the past twenty years of my life and remember the changes, some very traumatic, I am thankful for the faithful Father I have who brought me through the valleys. I rejoice that I have a Brother who has been an example for me and who went before me. It is His life that inspires me to not quit. The trials and tribulations I have experienced, and the change that I have encountered, all brought me closer to the Father and have made me a stronger person. I have become a more fervent believer. My relationship with God has become much more passionate and His Word has become immeasurably more powerful and active in my life. Going through fire need not be feared or despised if we allow it to be a refining fire rather than an annihilating and consuming inferno. We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus if we choose to be.

In my life I have learned that everything is a choice. I have a choice if I want to overcome or be defeated. I have a choice to grow or remain stagnant. I have a choice to accept God's help, His guidance and His discipline. I have a choice to allow His joy to be my strength and I have a choice to accept His peace or choose to remain anxious and troubled. Jesus told us that He has overcome the world. This means He has overcome our trials and problems. He has overcome evil.

We need to accept the fact that we are living in this fallen world. Jesus warned us that we would have troubles. But He also promised us that He would be with us through our difficulties and sufferings. He would carry our burdens. We simply need to give our worries to the Lord and allow Him to carry them. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done.

Where there are changes and trials, there are spiritual battles. Some of the battles are external forces trying to destroy us, but many are internal and just as deadly. There is a battle going on in our hearts and minds as we make choices. We need to not only be victorious in our actions, but in our thoughts as well. By sharing from my life, I hope to inspire you and challenge you to the higher call that we have in Christ Jesus. I encourage you to draw near to God and enjoy Him being near to you.

I have felt alone, abandoned and unheard. I have felt betrayed and cheated. I have felt like a failure. I have been hurt and offended. But I thank God that I don't have to allow these feelings to rule my heart and mind, or my life. I rejoice how I have grown and am growing as a result of these feelings that came from various changes that took place in my life. It was a struggle, and continues to be, but God was and is faithful.

Several years ago when my marriage and family were falling apart due to alcohol, gambling and sinful choices made by my husband, I thought I was going to die. I had a health issue that could have been fatal. This terrified me! I knew it was not normal. When I checked on line what it could be I panicked even more. I have never experienced such fear. Millions of thoughts rushed through my mind as I conversed with God. Everyone's first question is, "Why me?!" I was no different. But, how could God allow me to go through this when I had all these other burdens to deal with? I did not want to die. Personally, death would have been a welcomed rest, but I had young children that needed me to care for them and train them. Nobody else would bring them up in the Lord as I was. I didn't want anybody else to raise them. Yes, I felt selfish. I wanted to be their mother. But what is wrong with that?! I was their mother. What would happen to my children spiritually if I died? Would they even know truth and have the hope of being in the future kingdom? Didn't God know this could be detrimental to their eternal life? Yes, He did. I knew He did.

As I continued to dialogue with the Lord, He led me to freedom and peace. Did I think I could care for my children better than their Heavenly Father could? Did I think I loved them more than He did? I had to humble myself before Him and the situation. If God allowed me to die, I had to trust Him with the lives of my children. Who better could I trust but Him?! Once again I had to release them into His hands. I cannot begin to express what peace and freedom I felt in my spirit immediately. This intense conversation and mind renewal took all but a few minutes.

I still had a long road ahead of me in regards to my health issue. I had to continually remind myself of God's promises, His love and His faithfulness. I needed to continue to trust in Him. I rejoice and praise Him that He helped me through the next year and restored my health. Throughout that year I did my best to rest in the Lord.

A few years before this situation, when my son was a few years old, he fell out of the second story window one evening after the two children had gone to bed. My daughter came downstairs and nonchalantly told me that her brother had fallen out the window. How so many thoughts can go through ones head in less than a minute is incredible. As I ran out the door and around the side of the house so many things ran through my head. I didn't know how I would find him. I knew that there were a few good size rocks right under their window. I was hoping not to find his head smashed on one of them. I internalized that I may find him dead. What if he was? What would I do? I immediately felt an inconceivable peace. In my heart I knew I would be alright. There was nothing I could do whatever had happened. I was thankful for the time, no matter how short it was, that God had blessed us with. I knew I would see my son in the kingdom. I would be sad and hurt, but it would be OK. Death is a part of life. My child is not mine anyway. God loves him more than I do and He is ultimately in control. I had to release him into God's hands. I did. What peace I had. I was unbelievably calm as I ran.

When I turned the corner and saw him lying on the ground on his back with his head on the rock and not moving, I raced to his side. But, there was no blood. I spoke to him. He answered. Praise the Lord, he was alive. Next, I had to evaluate his body. I asked how he landed. He actually had landed on his stomach and had just rolled over. Unbelievably, only his arm was hurt a little.

God is so amazing! I was convinced immediately that my son's life was spared only by the hand of God. I can't even imagine how he fell. God's angels must have set him on the ground. The only way out the window was head first. He must have hit the two inch board sticking out from the side of the house just enough to turn him so he didn't hit head down. The next day I took him to the osteopath and she was amazed that the only after effect from this fall was a slightly sore arm.

This was the beginning of dealing with later change that takes place in life. I had already started letting go of my children in my heart. It is hard to do, but there is freedom and peace that comes with holding God's gifts with unclenched fists.

As my marriage deteriorated, my faith and trust in the Lord continued to grow. My fruit in the spirit ripened. I learned to seek peace and realized the value of true inner stillness. We can deal with anything in life if we have peace. And God promises His children peace that goes beyond understanding. Peace is health to our minds and bodies. And, it is our choice. He has already offered it each one of us, we need only to accept it and walk in it.

My Psalm of Pain and Praise

Oh how I cried out in agony. My soul wept without words, an empty scream. I never felt such anguish. I raised my hands to my Maker, my Sustainer. All that was in me I lifted to His throne. My sorrowful moans rose as my knees felt like falling. My heart wrung out a sacrifice of praise, my throat forced the words out.

Oh, how His mercy is sweet, His grace refreshing. Praising Him was like a healing balm in my spirit. As I praised Him His Spirit washed over my heart and mind as tears poured from my eyes. My pain was still there, but I no longer carried it alone. My loving Father embraced me. His Son lifted my load and comforted me. The joy of the Lord was my strength. That night in the dark kitchen wasn't the first time a tear was shed, nor was it the last. My Father elevated me to a new level of dependence upon Him. He drew me closer to His side. He gave me incredible strength, anything beyond that I had within me or have ever known. I yearned for His peace. He was faithful. Even though the storm continued to rage, I took refuge under His wing.

The lies... the deception... the rejection... harsh words... the sting was less. How I stood for so many years I don't know. It was not on my own strength. Oh, hallelujah!!! Looking back wearies my soul. My breath is short. Anxiety creeps in. Only praise to my Creator, my God, my Father, brings the oil of peace that saturates my body, mind and soul. My spirit can rest. How great is my God!!!! He is worthy of my praise, especially in the storm. Now when I praise Him my heart dances within me, even if it is heavy with sorrow.

My tears drenched me. My heart pleaded with God to take this burden. He is faithful. He truly did lift it from me. It was still there, but His Son was now carrying it.

Oh, the Lord is faithful! He is my refuge. He leads me. He guides me. My inmost being yearns for His spirit, my comforter. My heart sings out to Him. Oh, how refreshing it is to praise the Lord! Offer a sacrifice of praise to our God!

The last month in Russia was unlike any other in my life. God led me back to Minnesota for my children's and my physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. After returning, change continues daily. Time continues to heal things, or maybe just distance us from them. In any case, our lives have been turned upside down. God has blessed us with many faithful and kind brothers and sisters in Christ who have opened their homes to us, provided us with a vehicle, and helped us with our financial needs. God has been the Father to the fatherless and has revealed Himself to me and my children through the body of Christ. I certainly did not desire all these changes in my life. But I rejoice in God's provision and how He continues to reveal Himself to me and my children. We feel displaced, homeless. All of our belongings with the exception of a few suitcases have been left in Russia. We feel like we are wandering around in the desert. I praise God that His pillar of fire has been leading us and His manna fills us. My passion continues to be to serve the Almighty God and His Son. I look forward to the change that is coming. I desire a life of ministry and I want my children to grow and hunger for truth and righteousness. God has called me to speak forth His Word and to encourage, inspire and challenge the body of Christ to seek His peace and His strength and to cling to it with all of their might. If we choose to accept His peace, and to walk in His power, we will overcome. I still don't know when our lives will be settled and can move forward. I feel that life is hanging and blowing in the wind. I feel like I am holding my breath. I don't like not being in control or able to do anything about our problems. But this too is another life lesson in humility and trust.

I thank God for His strength to endure. He brought me through the valley of the shadow of death. He gave me green pastures and still waters to lie beside while I was there. He comforted me. He continues to restore my soul.

To God be the glory now and forever more!



REMEMBERING AT CHRISTMAS

By Dennis Baldwin

How many of you believed in Santa Claus when you were a little kid? I mean really believed. Can you remember? You know? We all come to where we are today by different paths. When I was a kid I really did believe in Santa Claus. My mother told me there was and I believed my mother. The Santa Claus thing took me a while to figure out; probably because it is so pervasive in our society. You know, “Yes Virginia there is a Santa Claus”? Even the weather men on TV and the newscasters get into the spirit of the idea. You have noticed the “spotting” of Santa?

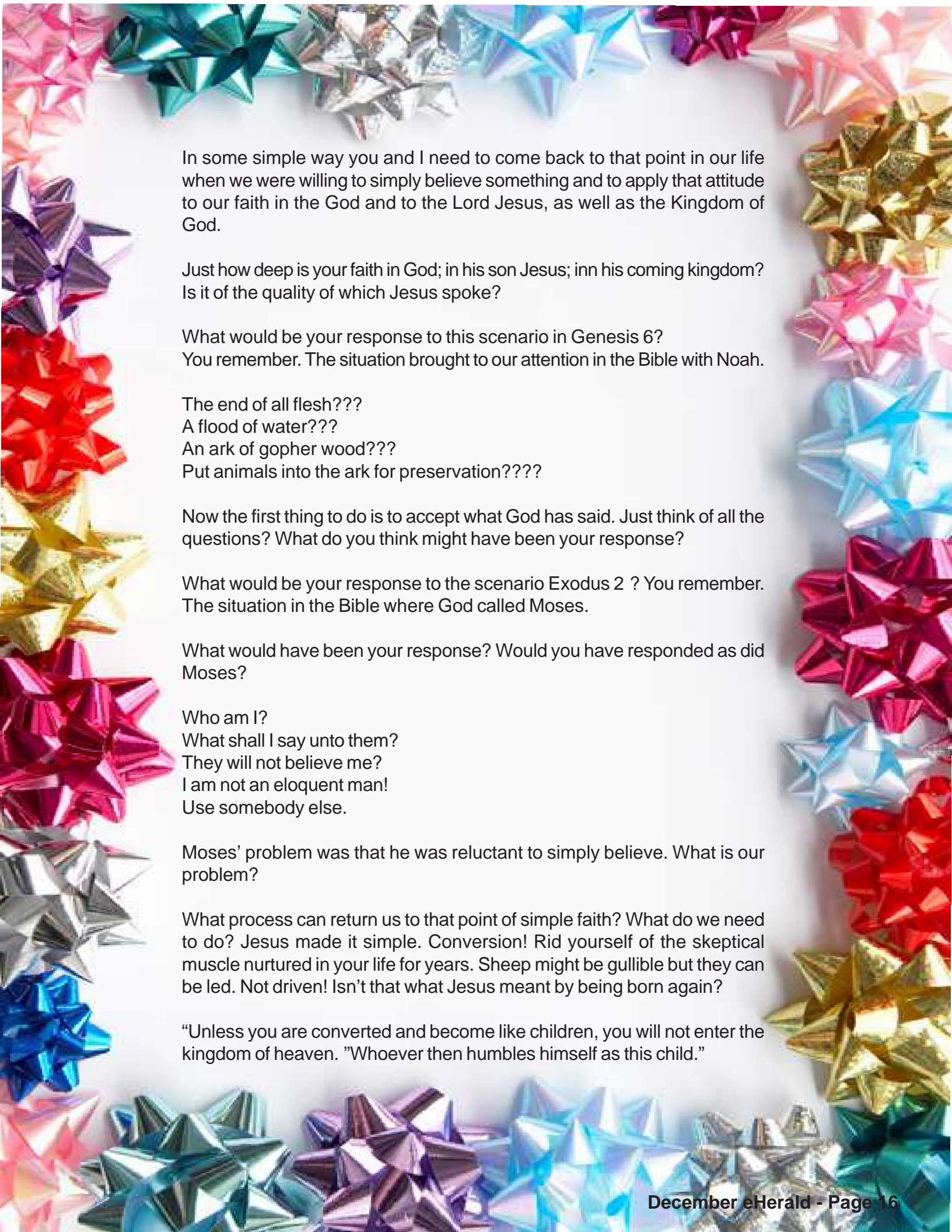
All this goes to bear upon a point that Jesus made:

Matthew 18: 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,³ and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ ”Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (NASB)

The humility thing is the primary to what Jesus was addressing but there is another dimension. As little children we haven’t fully developed our skeptical dimension. So in a sense some might say we were very gullible. To a point that might technically be correct. But there is another point to be made. It is the point of simple faith.

As parents we find it difficult to determine where to draw the line in training our children. We want them to be open and accepting but find that they just wind up being skeptical. So we tell them “never talk to strangers”. Not a bad idea in today’s world. But think of what might be missed.

Have you ever noticed how a little child’s eyes wanders around looking for someone to return their gaze and smile? If you will give them eye contact and smile they will usually smile back. Yes even at a perfect stranger. Their faith in people is simple.



In some simple way you and I need to come back to that point in our life when we were willing to simply believe something and to apply that attitude to our faith in the God and to the Lord Jesus, as well as the Kingdom of God.

Just how deep is your faith in God; in his son Jesus; in his coming kingdom? Is it of the quality of which Jesus spoke?

What would be your response to this scenario in Genesis 6? You remember. The situation brought to our attention in the Bible with Noah.

The end of all flesh???
A flood of water???
An ark of gopher wood???
Put animals into the ark for preservation????

Now the first thing to do is to accept what God has said. Just think of all the questions? What do you think might have been your response?

What would be your response to the scenario Exodus 2 ? You remember. The situation in the Bible where God called Moses.

What would have been your response? Would you have responded as did Moses?

Who am I?
What shall I say unto them?
They will not believe me?
I am not an eloquent man!
Use somebody else.

Moses' problem was that he was reluctant to simply believe. What is our problem?

What process can return us to that point of simple faith? What do we need to do? Jesus made it simple. Conversion! Rid yourself of the skeptical muscle nurtured in your life for years. Sheep might be gullible but they can be led. Not driven! Isn't that what Jesus meant by being born again?

"Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever then humbles himself as this child."



CHRISTMAS IS COMING

By David Hixson

Christmas is coming. Already the decorations are up in the shops. The Christmas carols are gently piped, not so that we will hear the words, but so that we will get the message - "Spend! Spend! Spend! It's Christmas time again! Come over here! Open up your purses and spend!"

A pastor I had a long time ago told me this story, "He remembered being invited to a party held to celebrate a wedding. He arrived late and knew no one there but the friend who had invited him, and his part in the proceedings was little more than that of a spectator. Everybody seemed to be in high spirits. They danced and shouted and sang and laughed and played games, and indulged in heaps of harmless fun. They flung streamers across the hall, they chased after balloons, they pranced about in fancy paper hats, they visited the bar for drinks, and young and old alike were reduced to a state of childish glee.

"Then he noticed a young lady sitting in a corner alone. She seemed very happy, and smiled pleasantly when he caught her eye, but he thought she seemed a bit neglected, and he whispered to his friend: 'Who's the young lady in the corner?'

"Don't you know?' he said, somewhat startled. 'I must introduce you. That's the bride...'"

Sounds rather improbable, doesn't it? But he insisted that it was true and unexaggerated in a single detail.

And here we are preparing to celebrate the coming of the King. Do we have space for him in our celebration? or do we just like celebrating? Is our Christmas a birthday party without the guest of honor?

The Jewish people had been waiting for their King to come. In those days kings and priests were anointed with oil to show that they were set apart for the special work God had for them to do. The Hebrew word for "anointed" was *mashiach* - rendered "messiah" in English. They were waiting, not for one more King, but for the Messiah. God had promised someone special who would come in God's good time to redeem his people.

In Isaiah 11 he is described as "a shoot from the stump of Jesse." The New American Standard Bible says, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD."



What will it be like when the shoot from the root of Jesse is King? The first difference will be the kind of king who is coming. He will be so different from any other king they have ever had before. His rule will be marked by complete fairness - he will not be playing favorites - not by appearance or status but justice and integrity towards everyone, even to the poorest and neediest in his kingdom.

So peace will be the mark of his kingdom. The whole creation will be transformed, brought back to what it was meant to be. Peace between wolf and sheep, between leopard and goat, between calf and lion, between cows and bears. "A little child will lead them... The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" as Isaiah tells us.

Of course, we don't yet live in that ideal world. But listen to what Paul says in Romans 8 - "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time".

Paul is saying that the whole physical world has been affected by the results of the human rejection of God, by human sin. We don't (and can't!) live in a Garden of Eden any more. We hear the Lord saying to Adam in Genesis 3, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return".

We too wait for that final restoration in which there will be perfect peace, justice and harmony. These are the marks of the kingdom!

And as the marks of his kingdom, they are also what the King will look for when he comes!

It came as a shock when a preacher appeared in the desert of Judaea dressed in clothes of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He began calling people to repent of their sins so that they could prepare for the coming of the Lord. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!," he told them. And people confessed their sins and were baptized in the Jordan River.

Will we be surprised when the Messiah comes? Have we repented and been baptized? We have been warned to be ready but are we truly ready?

I want to leave you with a story that I came across many years ago.

"For years now the Planning Committee had been at work - soon the dream would be a reality! The King would be coming soon!



The highest quality deep-pile carpet is being laid by a team of experts. The paint on the walls is a special new finish - and spotless. A superb sound system pipes the finest music to every room. Everything is designed for comfort, winter and summer. Wide windows afforded splendid views of the gardens - already a picture, thanks to the skills of the landscape gardeners...

You see, the King is coming. It seems he would be coming soon. They had to be ready! They had to have the place fit for the King!

Just as everything was ready and the happy day about to dawn, a young boy and an old man (a boy and his grandpa, perhaps) wandered through the grand gateway.

They weren't dressed in anything special - very ordinary, in fact! But nobody seemed to notice at first, because there were still one or two in overalls putting in some finishing touches.

They walked across the lawn, looked at the shrubs and flowers, then moved towards the steps. It was when they started up the steps that a shocked gasp went up from a couple of officials checking out the final details and a shout - "No! Stop! You can't go in there! Get out of here! You don't belong here! This place is for the King and it has to be kept fit for the King!"

The two were bundled out the gate and directed down the road - "and don't you ever come near here again!"

Soon the top dignitaries began to assemble, the trumpeters and the band arrived.

And the city folk, decked out in their best, crowded outside and lined the road to watch the expected arrival.

But the day wore on and nothing happened. Weeks passed, years, decades...

From time to time folk would gather near the House and listen to the well-rehearsed speeches, to the excellent trumpet fanfares and the fine music, to admire the architecture and enjoy the gardens...

Then, one night, it happened. The residents were woken by the strident wail of a siren. Putting on dressing gowns and slippers and looking a very motley crowd from least to greatest, they made their way to where the noise seemed to be coming from the city square. What was it all about?

There right before them was the King himself!

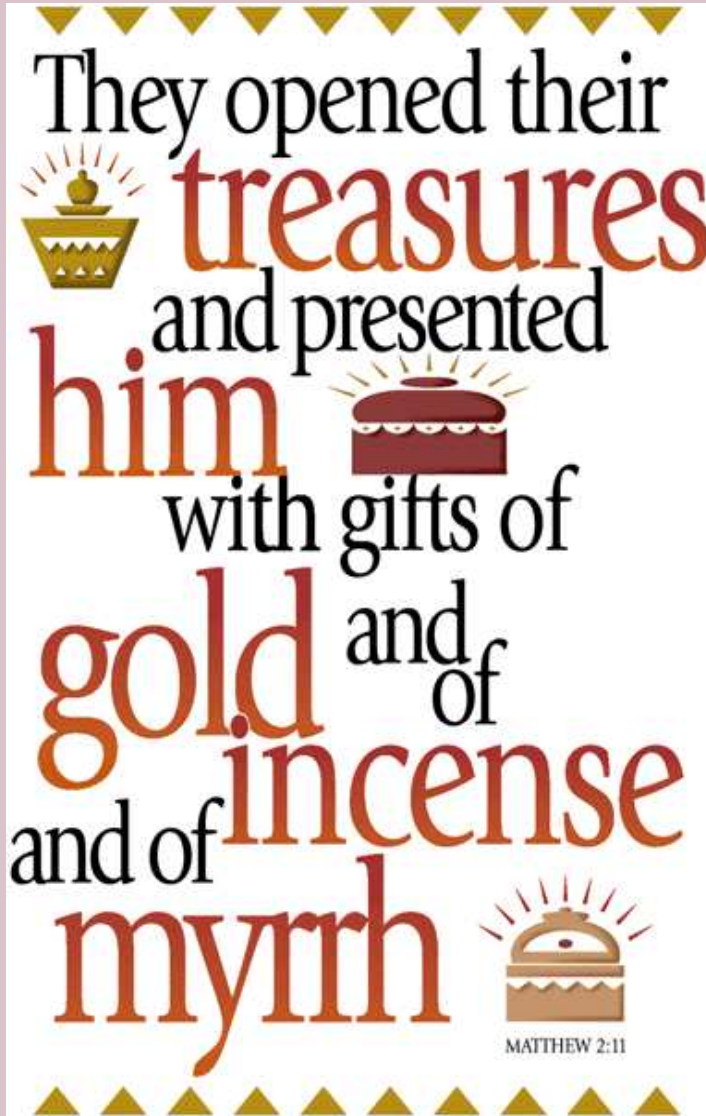
A shocked gasp went up. One of the leading officials spluttered, "Why didn't you come? We were waiting. We were rehearsing for your arrival! "

And when the King of the whole universe comes, will he say, "I was a stranger and you did not invite me in... I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matt. 25.43-45)?



The Gifts of the Magi

By Scott Ross



It was your typical Sunday School Christmas Program, with a little girl holding her doll, kneeling before a cardboard manger, an awkward “Joseph” standing beside her, embarrassed that he has to pretend to be Mary’s husband, and both surrounded by others in bathrobes, heads covered with Mom’s towels, having come with haste to see this things that has come to pass. Then enter three more children with nicer bathrobes and cardboard crowns on their heads, bearing gifts. The line that had been carefully practiced was, “We are three wisemen who have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.” The boy with the line remembered all except the first phrase, “We are three wisemen.” The program director, trying to prompt him in a whisper, asked, “Who are you?” One of the three brought peals of laughter when he replied, “We’re the three wise guys!”

Who were these “wise guys” and why did they come and bring gifts? There are several things that are often confusing. First, we do not know that there were three. People assume that because there were three gifts. But the number of wisemen is not given in Scripture. Second, although most nativity sets display the wisemen in the stable around the manger, the Bible tells us by the time they arrived, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus were in a house (Matthew 2:11). (If it had been wise women they would have asked for directions and probably arrived on time. Plus they would have brought a casserole for Mary and Joseph.) But, we do know these wisemen or Magi

were from the east and were looking for one born to be a king. They had seen signs in the heavens that indicated to them that a king had been born. Their intent in traveling to see this king was to worship him. These Magi were probably wise and holy men. Perhaps they had previous contact with Jewish exiles and may have been familiar with Daniel’s prophecies.

When they found the child, they were overjoyed (Matthew 2:10), they worshipped him (Matthew 2:11), and they presented Jesus with gifts (Matthew 2:11). The three gifts presented were gold, incense (frankincense), and myrrh. All of these gifts were of value, and they probably helped to finance Mary and Joseph’s trip to Egypt to escape Herod’s evil. But more than that, all three of these gifts speak of Jesus’ role and ministry.

Myrrh

Myrrh is mentioned in the Old Testament. When Jacob's sons were trying to decide whether to kill their brother or not because of their jealousy, a caravan of Ishmaelites from Gilead passed by, and they sold their brother as a slave to these traders. Genesis 37:25 describes these traders: *Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.* Later, when the brothers have to go down into Egypt and appear unbeknown to them, before their brother, their father sends gifts to take with them – *a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds* (Genesis 43:11). Exodus 30 describes the anointing oil that Moses was to prepare, and one of the ingredients was myrrh. In the Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon, myrrh is mentioned a number of times as a perfume used to make women more attractive. And when Esther was to appear before the king, myrrh was part of the beauty treatment.

But the New Testament introduces a more somber and ominous use of this valuable spice. *They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it* (Mark 15:22,23). Perhaps this spice had a numbing effect, perhaps it was to make the wine more palatable, but Jesus refused it.

The final reference to myrrh in the Bible is in John 19 where Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea ask Pilate for the body of Jesus: *Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with the Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.... They laid Jesus there.* Myrrh, in accordance with Jewish burial customs, was a spice used to prepare the body for burial. There is a beauty in the realization that this gift given to him at birth (and probably sold by Mary and Joseph to finance their fleeing to Egypt) would come back to Jesus at this death through the generous gift of two other men.

The shadow of the cross extended even to his birth. The gift of myrrh, a spice used for burial, given to Jesus by the Magi foreshadowed his coming death. Jesus knew that he was born to die in our place that we might have forgiveness and life. Myrrh was an appropriate gift for one born to die for the sins of the world.

Incense

When we worship, we unfortunately limit our senses to primarily our eyes and ears, to seeing and hearing. But as the early Jews worshipped God, they involved all five senses – not only seeing and hearing, but also touch, taste, and smell. Worship for them was a total sensory experience. Incense was a part of the worship experience. When the children of Israel brought gifts so that the tabernacle could be built, incense was one of the gifts brought (Exodus 25:1-9). And incense became an integral part of the worship of the Jews in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Exodus 30:1-8). The special incense that was to be used in worship included frankincense (Exodus 30:34-36). In Psalm 141, David likens prayer to the incense of the evening sacrifice. And in Revelation 8:3,4, as the seventh seal is opened, John say incense mingled with the prayers of the saints.

The gift of incense or frankincense, given by the Magi to Jesus, was a fitting gift for one born to be our high priest. Because Jesus is our high priest, we can come boldly before the throne of grace. For our high priest can sympathize with our weaknesses. And through him, we find mercy and grace and help in our times of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). God does not want us to struggle alone. He has provided in Jesus the perfect high priest to help us in our spiritual journey. The gift of incense that the Magi brought reminds us of Jesus' priestly ministry.

Gold

Gold is a fit gift for a king. The Magi were looking for a king (Matthew 2:2) and when they knelt before Jesus they knew they had found him. They worshipped him and gave him gifts, including gold, the gift fit for a king (Matthew 2:10,11).

Don't be fooled because Jesus was born in a stable and slept in a humble manger. This child was born to be a king. It was no mistake that the angel told Mary that this child she would have would sit upon the throne of his father David and reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32,33). It was no accident that Mary ended up in Bethlehem when her child was born, for the prophet Micah had foretold that it was there that a ruler would be born (Micah 5:2). Jesus himself knew he had been born to be king. When Pilate asked him if he was a king, Jesus replied, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born" (John 18:37). Gold was a proper gift for the Magi to give to one born to be king.

But Jesus' life ended on a cross, not a throne. And had his death been the end of the story, it would have been a tragic mistake. But the cross was not the final chapter, for it was followed by the resurrection. And in fact, the final chapter has not yet been written. But make no mistake. Jesus, born to be king, will be king. The last question his disciples asked before he ascended into heaven was, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" and Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:6). Jesus knew, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory (Matthew 25:31). When he returns, in power and great glory, his robe will be inscribed, *King of kings and Lord of lords* (Revelation 19:16). *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20).

Wise Men Still Seek Him

The Magi traveled far, seeking Jesus. When they found him they rejoiced, they worshipped him, and they presented gifts to him. They gave him myrrh, a spice used for burial, foreshadowing his death for our sins. They gave him incense, for he was born to be our perfect high priest. And they gave him gold, for Jesus is destined to be King of all kings. In these three gifts we see how Jesus came to die for our sins, how he lives today to make intercession for us as our high priest, and how he will return to rule as king in God's coming Kingdom.

The Magi knew he was worth seeking. Wise people still seek him today. He is the answer for our sin problem that separates us from God. He is the friend and help we all need in our journey of life. And he is our hope for life in the age to come when he returns to sit upon his throne. Yes, wise people still seek him!



Reasonable, Reachable & Realistic Resolutions

By Chuck Jones



The New Year is upon us. How do we celebrate it? We give presents to family and friends at Christmas, now we can give gifts to ourselves...in the form of resolutions. Winter months tend to lend themselves to inactivity. That inactivity will doubtless lead us into self-evaluation. That's where the shortcomings and need for improvement show up. Often to make ourselves feel better about life, we will give

the gift (to ourselves) of resolutions. "I need to start doing something, or stop doing something." The knowledge of the need for self-reformation is often as far as it goes. I've been there. I've also found out that simply thinking when action is needed won't change things. As observed in the Sluggard of Proverbs: *"In all labor there is profit, But idle chatter leads only to poverty"* (Proverbs 14:23).

It reminds me of the old soup commercial, while an announcer spoke about the quality and taste of the soup, a young (presumably hungry) voice said, "Talk, talk, talk, when do we eat?" Self-assessment is critical. Who knows your heart better than you? Especially when we ask Yahweh to help in that assessment!

However being resolved to make changes may be pretentious. *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil"* (James 4:13-16). If I were to apply this to making New Year's Resolutions, then I'd have to include the next verse. *"therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."* (verse 17).

I've been taught that verse has been applied to doing good for someone else. And if there is some good that we see we can do and then decide not to do it's sin. Yes I believe that, but there is more. If there is a necessity to change in your life, and you refuse to do it, that's sin.

If we are living in the light that James sheds on us, there is no real need for such resolutions. Especially when we wait a whole year before we make any determinations whether there is a need for assessment or change. This should be a daily practice. The process of sanctification is backed by the process of repentance.

When the topic of resolutions comes up is there a need for repentance? The pain of shame and or guilt should move us to decisive permanent changes. Why wait? I'm reminded of the plague of frogs that

came upon Egypt. (Exodus 8:8-10). When Pharaoh asked Moses to get rid of the frogs, Moses gave Pharaoh the opportunity to choose when. “Tomorrow” the king answered. Why wouldn’t you want those slimy things gone now? Think of your sins like those frogs. How comfortable we are with them no matter how disgusting they are.

Profession vs. Function

Self evaluation is not the end. Taking stock of our character flaws and lack of discipline is a good practice, however it must be accomplished with change. Otherwise it is just a fruitless activity. Some call it “navel gazing.” As we read from Proverbs, it leads to poverty.

Resolutions can become an annual tradition without any power. An empty exercise of words without deeds. Which brings up a serious point; vows. It’s better to not make them, than make them and not keep them (Eccl. 5:5). Yahweh isn’t interested in our idle chatter about what we need to improve in our lives. He already sees it and is aware of it. What He desires is participation on our part. He has granted us His Spirit and wants our cooperation with it to achieve His desired results.

Reasonable, Reachable & Realistic Resolutions.

Are there changes that need to be made in your life? There are in mine and this article is making me realize it. Here are some suggestions that may help.

Daily Bible reading. This may be high on a lot of resolution lists. It is important to feed on the Scriptures every day. Put your Bible next to or near your vitamins or medication. This can act a good reminder to take a daily dose of Spiritual food. There are plenty of good “plans” to get through the Bible in one year. A plan that I’ve suggested over the years is to use today’s date and read the corresponding chapter of Proverbs. As I’ve done this I am continually amazed that new observations are brought to light each time I read them.

Controlling my tongue. How we talk shows what’s in our hearts. Foul language, or course jokes indicate heart problems.

Church attendance. As a pastor, I get paid to go to church. Not everyone is as fortunate as I am. However, this habit is life building. It blesses others, and builds us up.

Financial giving. “Well, I just don’t have enough to give!” someone may respond. I would have to respectfully disagree with that. Yahweh has promised to give us enough to give away. It all comes down to how are you handling what He gives you.

Wholesome entertainment. Yes, it may seem like it’s our free time, and we can do with it what we want, but that’s not the way it works. We have been bought with a price, and we are not our own. So we need to honor Yahweh with our bodies and spirits. I’ve asked people if what they are entertained by honors God? He knows where we go, and how we spend the time He has given us.

Healthy habits. One of the points on the list that gets shoved to the bottom. Getting some exercise. Well, now this is a horse of a different color. I’m sure, as I’m reaching those semi-golden years, that no matter what our level of physical activity, it can always be increased a little. I’m not able to do what I once did physically. But I am able to increase my activity to more than what I did yesterday.

I’m unable to make a complete list of those things in the lives of others that need to be changed. I’ll leave that up to you. Suffice it to say that it is a reasonable activity if it is accompanied with action.



WHERE IS YOUR UMBRELLA?

By Dennis Baldwin

On a cold day like today (November 28, 2010) it is particularly pleasant to remember those long walks taken during the summer months.

Beginning usually around eight o'clock, donning our walking shoes and clothes, Rachel and I would strike out on our daily evening health and well being walk. It was not uncommon to meet other people walking who like ourselves realized all the values associated with a healthy daily walk.


Often we would warm up by a brisk walk down Fulton Lane over to the farm and then up Kesler Road, and I do mean *up*. Then down South Fork, pick up Kesler again at the bottom of the hill and then back to our house at 1137 Kesler Rd. It can be enjoyed in all the seasons of the year by those who are braver and hardier.

I recall one walk in particular. The summer of 2010 was especially dry. One summer evening it appeared (we hoped and prayed) it might come a shower before we ended our walk so I took a small umbrella along just in case. One doesn't want to take a chance of melting in the summer rain does one?


As we came down to the bottom of South Fork a neighbor and his wife were sitting out on their front porch enjoying the cool of the day. "Hello", I said. "If you're going to pray for rain you probably should carry an umbrella shouldn't you?" "Yes, a good idea", was the reply. We went on our way home thinking of what a simple but good testimony that was. No we didn't get that much needed rain that day or even the next.

The next day we took our evening walk. The weather didn't appear to be threatening so I didn't carry an umbrella that day. The neighbor on South Fork and his wife were again sitting on their front porch enjoying the beautiful evening. "Hello, I said". "Hello," he said, "where's your umbrella?" My testimony was cancelled wasn't it? What had happened to my confidence that the Lord would hear our prayers and give a refreshing summer rain that day?


Is that the way of our faith: vibrant and fresh one day and barely negligible the next? I recall the last phrase of a song we sang at youth camp "He does the things others cannot do...He specializes in thing thought impossible."



During this season of the year we are reminded again of the miracle of the birth in Bethlehem. But do you ever think about the miracle that preceded the birth of our dear savior?



Do you remember the story in Luke 1:5-16? Zacharias was a priest whose wife was Elizabeth. They were old people. Even though they had prayed long and hard for a child to nurture, Elizabeth was barren. While in the temple carrying out his duties, Zachariah was visited by an angel of the Lord. The angel reminded Zacharias that God had truly hear their prayers and would surely give them a child, a special child. As the story progresses, Elizabeth became pregnant and at six months Gabriel, the angel of the Lord visited her relative Mary with news also of her pregnancy and forthcoming birth of a son. The message of Gabriel was punctuated with this statement. "FOR WITH GOD NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE".



Remember! "God specializes in things thought impossible". YOUR PRAYER IS HEARD was the message to Zacharias. How reassuring it must have been to Zacharias. He and his wife Elizabeth had been without a child all those many years. How reassuring to know that God had heard their prayers. May I dare make a simple statement?


Shouldn't it be enough to know that God has heard our prayer? Just to know that he has heard it. Just to know that he is aware of our desire.

I Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: (KJV)

Isn't that enough? Knowing that the creator of the universe is listening to our prayers?

I John 5:14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 14 And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (NASB)

Do we ask it according to his will? Do we dare to leave it up to his discretion? Will we let him make the call.



World cups..super bowls..world series are won and lost on the basis of allowing the coach to make the call. Punt or go for the first down...bunt or swing away...attempt a goal now or wait til the last minute? Who do we let make the call? We let the one who we have allowed to be in control. He knows the best. He can make the call. THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WE HAVE BEFORE HIM.



Zacharias and Elizabeth had, during their marriage, asked God to allow them to have a child. But they had put it in his hands. They would let him make the call. Even in their old age they continued to pray. Perhaps somehow believing that all things are possible with God.

The thing we need do is to believe that all things are possible. Who knows what God will do? But knowing that with God all things are possible we must still let him make the call.

- When Jesus was going to the cross—God made the call.
- When Stephen was being stoned to death—God made the call.
- When David was facing Goliath—God made the call.
- When Shadrach, Meschec, and Abednego were cast into the burning fiery furnace—God made the call.
- When Zacharias and Elizabeth continued to pray for a child in their old age—God made the call.
- When Rachel and I prayed for a child in our early marriage—God made the call.

What call has God made in your life?
 The important thing is that we believe all things are possible with God.
 The angel of the Lord asked Abraham, in Genesis 18: 14 "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD? He specializes in things thought impossible...He does the things others cannot do. Is there something difficult in your life that you need? Ask God. He specializes in things though impossible. But he might not do it. So what? Didn't you allow him to make the call? Do you get it? Is it sinking in? After all these years I am beginning to get it. The song asks: Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel thru? What about you?

Jeremiah 32:17 Ah, Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee: (KJV)

We need to accept Paul's contribution to this possibility thinking:

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. 21 to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (NASB)