

Our Savior, Christ the Lord

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There is no better time of the year to contemplate the purpose for which God sent our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the world than the Christmas holiday season which is already upon us. Certainly, the great majority of Christian believers realize that Christmas, if it is to have any useful meaning at all, must be a time to celebrate Christ's birth and the reasons for which he came.

There are many verses in the New Testament which summarize the meaning and significance of what Christ came to accomplish by his life, death, resurrection and future return (e.g. John 3:16; I John 3:8b; Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4-7). Each of these verses emphasizes one or another aspect of God's plan of salvation because Jesus is, above all else, our "Savior, Christ the Lord." This, of course, was the "good news" that was announced almost two thousand years ago to the shepherds who were watching their flocks at night in the fields of Judea:

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

Unfortunately, this simple message of "great joy" has long since been engulfed by an avalanche of century upon century of pagan tradition and now by an ever increasing tide of commercialization. There are however two very important truths contained in the angel's announcement to those shepherds that still resonate with tremendous meaning and urgency for a world in need today.

The first truth is the meaning of the words a "Savior, Christ the Lord." Inherent in these words is the central - and simple - message of the Bible itself. As with all words used in the Bible we must understand these titles "Savior," "Christ" and "Lord" based upon their original biblical meaning as found in the scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Since biblical revelation is progressive and moves forward from the Old Testament to the New, each of these terms takes on added clarity and

depth of meaning as the biblical plan of salvation unfolds in ever greater detail.

All three of the titles above are Messianic titles which describe the mission and role of the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus our Savior is "Christ the Lord" because he is also "the Lord's (God's) Christ" (Acts 4:26). In other words, Jesus is God's anointed Messiah, as foretold in Old Testament prophecy. He is God's agent through which God's plan of salvation is accomplished. As the Messiah of God, Jesus had to first be "obedient unto death" as the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 so as "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Only after his "sufferings" and then his victorious resurrection could he "enter into his glory" (Luke 24) as the exalted "Lord" and "Christ" in fulfillment of Psalm 110 (cf. Acts 2:22-36). It is from his exalted position in heaven that he will one day return in power and glory to "bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28). This will be the time of the "restoration of all things" as "foretold by all the prophets" (Acts 3:18-26). The time when all of God's people and creation will enjoy "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18-22; cf. Phil. 3:20-21).

This brings us to the second great truth of the angel's announcement because this "good news of great joy" about our Savior, Christ the Lord is meant to be for "all people." This is later spelled-out in greater detail in the book of I Timothy:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time (I Tim. 2:3-6).

In Christ Jesus, God has acted to break down every barrier that separates mankind from God as well as mankind from his fellowman. For the Jewish people of Jesus' day a "crucified Messiah" (I Cor. 2:23) was a contradiction in terms - even a scandal! Their understanding of the Messiah was focused on looking for a delivering king who would free the Jewish nation from its political bondage. How then

could such a Messiah be crucified? Especially since to hang on a tree was nothing less than a curse according to the Old Testament scriptures. And yet contrary to all expectations it was through "becoming a curse for us" that Jesus "redeemed us" in order that "the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [all people, not just Jews] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:13-14).

It is this simple gospel message that is the "good news of great joy" announced by the angel. And it is *in* this simple gospel message that "the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery" (I Cor. 2:6-8) has now been revealed and displayed in all its fullness. God's "plan of the ages" (Eph. 3:11) has been put into effect through Christ. He has broken down all barriers so as to make true reconciliation and peace available to *all* people through faith in Christ:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which

he put to death their hostility (Eph. 2:13-16).

The result is a new family of God's people - irrespective of ethnic race, religious past or worldly status - bound together by the Spirit of God in the one church of the body of Christ:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Jesus is our "Savior, Christ the Lord" because as God's unique Son by divine conception he has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. He is the true "seed of Abraham" and now he awaits the time in the future when "the mystery of God's will" which he "purposed in Christ" will reach its final fulfillment - "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10).

This is truly good news of great joy for all people!

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