

December 25, 2008

The Birth of Christ

May God bless you all on this day when we especially commemorate the significance of the birth of our savior, Christ Jesus our Lord! Following is a beautiful rendition of the birth of Christ in the New Living Translation from Luke 2:

"At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) Everyone went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there wasn't any room for them in the inn. That night in the fields near Bethlehem there were some shepherds guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the Lord's glory flashed brightly around them. The shepherds were frightened. The angel said to them:

"Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, King David's hometown! You will know who he is, because you will find him wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the first angel, singing praises to God:

"Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

Then the angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger! After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this baby. Everyone who heard the shepherds' story was amazed, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen and heard. It had been just as the angel had told them." (Luke 2:1-20 NLT).

This is certainly a beautiful translation of this life-changing historical event. What a great day that was for those involved and for those of us who, ever since, have received the benefits of "the grace and truth" which came to us through God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord (John 1:1-18).

With much love in Christ,

Richie and Dorota Temple

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December 31, 2008

A Eulogy of Father

My father, Landis McNeill Temple, died on Sunday night Dec. 28. He was one of the greatest men - indeed, Christian men - I've ever known. The following is my Eulogy of him which I presented at his funeral service or, more properly, a "Celebration of the Life of Landis McNeill Temple" on Wednesday, December 31 at West Raleigh Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, N.C.:

A Eulogy of the Christian Life of My Father, Landis McNeill Temple

By his Third and Youngest Son, Allen Richard (Richie) Temple

December 31, 2008

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver."

(Proverbs 25:11 NRSV, ESV)

My father was, very simply, one of the greatest men I have ever known. The older I have become the more he has stood out for me as the single most important example amongst those whom I personally know of how to live my own life in relationship to others. Indeed, more and more I see him in me. Although we rightly honor him today for the many, many good works of service that he performed on behalf of others, the father I knew was, above all else, a man of principled Christian character – a character which manifested itself in many different ways throughout his life, depending on the times and situation. Like so many others of his generation – which, if not the greatest, was certainly one of the greatest – his life and values were shaped in the midst of the world in which he grew up and lived. He was born and raised in a large Christian family on a farm in Lee County, North Carolina. He grew up during the Great Depression and fought and was wounded in World War II. He finished college on the GI Bill and after graduating from North Carolina State University spent his entire professional life helping develop North Carolina's road and bridge system into one of the nation's best. He also lived his adult life as a dedicated Christian layman, a devoted husband, a strong and providing father, and, finally, as a progressive Democrat and Christian volunteer.

All of this took place in the midst of the tensions of the Cold War, the tumults of the racial tensions of the Civil Rights movement that so divided the South, and finally, in the midst of the more recent decline in Christian values and the sweeping social changes of modern America. Through all of these times the principled Christian character of Landis McNeill Temple, the father whom I knew, did not change. Never once in my entire life did I ever see him compromise on what he would consider to be his bedrock principles, beliefs, and values – irrespective of the cost. He was, however, wise enough to grow and

adapt in accordance to his own personal situation, age, and the times in which he lived – while still holding to those bedrock principles, beliefs and values.

The Landis McNeill Temple whose life we celebrate today is for most of us the Landis McNeill Temple of more recent memory. That was, in a sense, the kinder, gentler version whose life was known to many – including his daughters-in-law, his grandchildren, his great grandchildren, and the many, many other people whose lives he touched. This was a man who in his retirement was freed from the daily pressures of working for a living and was able to devote himself fully to serving others. This man was not only my father but also my friend and I will always remember this more recent time of his life with great endearment.

There was, however, another aspect of my father's life that was, for me, even more important because it helped form in me the character that I have carried throughout my own life in the many varied and challenging endeavors that I've undertaken or faced personally. This was the sterner father of my childhood and teenage years. It was the same Landis McNeill Temple of principled Christian character. However, that character manifested itself at that time in a more no-nonsense and straightforward manner. After all, my father whose character was formed during the times of the Great Depression and World War II wasn't raising daughters; he was raising sons to become men. Simply put, my father expected us, his sons, to know what was right and to do it. When we did there was not praise but simply the acknowledgement that duty had been fulfilled, as should be expected. At most, there might be a little nod of the head in our direction. On the other hand, when we did not do what was expected there were consequences – very direct – and without discussion. After all, we knew what was expected.

My mother has at times mentioned to my brothers and me how my father softened in his later life, hoping that we her sons would understand that. Indeed, my father himself has at times said that he was perhaps too stern with us in our childhood. Well, maybe and maybe not. The older I get the more I think that that kind of attitude, which is so against the grain of modern Western society, is just what is needed, though perhaps leavened somewhat with a mixture of tenderness. Personally, I cherish the memories of all that I learned during those days. And, I do not think the lessons I learned would have been as effective for me personally had they been delivered in any other way. Let me share with you some of the most precious of those memories and the lessons I have learned from them. We are all familiar with my father's sterling example in deeds. But these memories have to do with words that he, my father, spoke to me, as a son, while I was growing up; and, the profound impact that those words have had on my life in so many ways ever since. That is why I have sub-titled this eulogy:

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

1. Race Relations: When I was very young – around eight years old – in the early 1960s racial tensions were at a fever pitch in the South. One day I was out playing with my brother Steve and some of our neighborhood friends. Somebody – I don't remember who – made a racial slur and my father heard it. Immediately, he told us to come into the house. He then sat us down and very directly and sternly told us, “ We are all equally important to God, irrespective of the color of our skin – I never, ever want to hear a racial slur coming from your mouths again.” He never did, because his point was made –

very directly – and, because we observed that very same belief, principle and value in his own life through his own actions during those years. He was far ahead of his times in that belief because such an attitude was very much against the grain of the segregationist South in which we lived. But those words that were so “fitly spoken” were embedded in my heart from that day onward and they have always enabled me – whether here in America or in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe where I have lived, worked and traveled – to look at people without any racial or national prejudice whatsoever; but rather, to deal with each person as an individual human being who, like me, was created in the image of God and was, therefore, intrinsically worthy of dignity and respect.

2. Baseball: In my childhood and teenage years sports dominated much of the life of my family. Both of my older brothers were athletes and so was I. We constantly practiced, played together and played in school and community leagues. When I was fourteen I was playing in Junior League baseball and my father was my coach. During that year I was tearing up the league with my hitting and by near the end of the year I gotten at least one hit in every game. In one of the last games I got a base hit and while rounding first base slipped, fell, and dislocated my left thumb. Our assistant coach, Ken Creech, came out and grabbed my hand, looked at it, and then popped my thumb back into place. Nevertheless, I was still in a lot of pain. I continued to play, however, and the next time I came to bat I had to hold the bat with my right hand a few inches above my left hand so as not to put any pressure on my left thumb. I was, however, afraid to swing at the ball for fear of the pain and, of course, for fear of how ridiculous I might look. Therefore, I took five straight pitches without swinging so that the count became three balls and two strikes. As I stepped out of the batter’s box to calm myself for a moment a voice - a booming stern voice - broke the tense silence throughout the ballpark. “Richard!” - not, mind you, “Richie”; but “Richard!” “if you’re not going to swing at the ball, I’ll put somebody in there who will!” That voice was, of course, my father’s voice and everyone in the ballpark could hear it. He didn’t say, “Richie, are you o.k.?” or “Richie, take a little time to get in touch with your inner feelings.” Instead, he was stern, direct and to the point. And so, I knew what was expected. On the next pitch – I don’t remember if it was a strike or a ball; it didn’t matter to me at that time because from the moment I had heard that voice I was set in my mind to swing irregardless – I swung and hit a hard ground ball that bounced over the third baseman’s head for a single. After that I continued to play every game until the end of season getting at least one hit in every game – while, of course, holding the bat with my right hand a few inches above my left to relieve the pain in my left thumb. The lessons that I learned from these words that were so “fitly spoken” were many. First, my father taught me that as his son on a team he coached I was not only to receive no special treatment; but, if anything, that more was expected of me than others (he would not, of course, have said those words to anyone else on the team). Second, I learned that if I was to undertake any endeavor in life that shrinking from the task or feeling sorry for myself or complaining would do me no good at all; instead, if I was to compete – in a game or in life – I needed to do my best irrespective of the obstacles in my way. I cannot adequately express how deeply those words and the lessons learned from them were embedded in my heart from that moment on. I have carried them with me in all that I’ve done ever since.

3. Learning English: When I was a junior in high school I constantly complained to my parents about having to take English. I – at the age of 17 - felt it was worthless, boring and a waste of my time. In the

last discussion about this that I had with my father I demanded to know “Why do I need to take English?” His reply was short, stern, and to the point: “Because you do!!” That was the end of that discussion and we never discussed it again. But what I didn’t understand – or refused to acknowledge - at that time was that I did not, at that age, know what I needed to learn to help me in my future life. I was simply too young and did not know the usefulness of mastering English for my future life. My father, of course, did and he expected me to simply acknowledge and trust that adults simply knew more about what I needed to learn than I did. Mine was a generation where “father (and other adults) knew best” – not, the other way around. Ten years later I was to teach English for five years to doctoral students and college professors at one of finest universities in Poland. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. In my first semester I also had the joy of teaching a young doctoral student in physics named Dorota Sendorek. She was the best English student I’ve ever taught and one of the greatest lovers of the English language I’ve ever known. Today, her name is Dorota Sendorek Temple, my wonderful wife of twenty-four years.

4. Going to College: My first attempts at going to college were less than successful. I was involved in many other things that I thought were more important and was dismayed with the general attitudes prevalent on college campuses during the 1970s. My parents, especially my mother, believed I had the ability to do well in college and believed that it would benefit my life greatly. In our last discussion about it my mother told me of all the benefits of getting a college education. She was right, of course, but I had a counter argument for everything she said. My father, however, after listening for a while simply said to my mother, “He doesn’t need to go to college. He can be a good citizen without going to college.” Those words went straight to my heart and there is probably nothing he could have said that would have more inspired me to go to college. Not because I was rebellious and wanted to do the opposite of what my father said. Instead, his saying those words made me realize that they were not encouraging me to go to college just because it was thing that everyone else was doing at the time and, thus, it was expected of me as well. They really did want what was best for me and they really did believe that a person’s worth had nothing whatsoever to do with one’s education or academic achievements. And so, I did, in fact, complete my college education, doing quite well and achieving a fair amount of distinction in doing so. More than that, however, it opened up doors for me for the rest of my life that never would have been possible without a college education and college degree. Indeed, for the last ten years I have taught high school history at Woods Charter School in Chatham County – a college preparatory school. During that entire ten year period I have also been responsible for college preparation for the school, an area in which we have achieved a great deal of success. What are the first words I say to my students in preparing them for college? They are, “You don’t need to go to college to be a success in life. College will never make you any better than anyone else and you can be just as good of a citizen by not going to college as by going to college. However, we are a college preparatory school; so if you’re here, this is what we expect of you” And so, my father’s words “fitly spoken” motivated not only me, but have also, through me, motivated many of my own students as well.

It is this father whom I will always remember and cherish. A father who taught me by both words and deeds. Not by deeds alone, but by words also - words “fitly spoken like apples of gold in a setting of silver”.

In one of the last conversations I had with my father – just a few weeks ago – he told me that he was fearful of the world that the next generations including his sons and their wives, and his grandchildren and great grandchildren would be living and growing up in. My response was to remind him of the world that he himself grew up in - the world of the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War and the tumultuous changes of life in the South. I told him that he had set an example for others to follow - an example that would not be forgotten - and that those who followed could, by living with the same principled Christian character that he had lived, deal with challenges of their own generation as well – however great they might be. And that, I believe, will prove to be true. Surely, no greater statement could be made about any man’s life.

Richie Temple

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