

## **WHAT CAN A SAVIOR DO?** **From Obscurity to Significance**

“Angels we have heard on high ...” is one of the favorite carols of Christmas ... and for good reason. The Christmas story is filled with angels: The angel Gabriel visited Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and then visited Mary, mother of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew reports that an angel visited Joseph in his dreams telling him to wed Mary, then flee to Egypt after Jesus’ birth. But there is one angelic visit that includes a whole host of angels. We read it on Christmas Eve: *In that region there were shepherds ... then an angel of the Lord stood before them ... and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God ...* That’s amazing!

Just as amazing is the angels’ appearance of shepherds in the first place – they were often hired hands in a lonely and humble occupation. Why would an angel appear to them, they were nobodies? Yet that’s how it happened. They went into town to see this thing announced by the angels and found this newborn Messiah just as described and He looked like one of their own ... lying in a feeding stall. Then **they became the very first evangelists, spreading the good news.** In the process they moved from obscurity to significance.

## **Does Christmas Matter?**

Do these events from 2,000 years ago really concern us? Does Christmas even matter? Some believe the Christmas story is hokum, making no difference in anyone’s life or human history. Life is what it is and there’s no bigger picture to be part of. All we can do is just hang on as long as we can (see Ecc. 2:22-24).

Some say Christmas is irrelevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century life. Science and technology and “enlightened” leaders are making a better life for all people and for our environment. We needn’t trouble ourselves over a “big picture.” Bits, bytes, and data have replaced religious expressions and the traditions that help people find meaning and significance. Life is best if we just flow with the current of the times. If we are only the cleverest creatures on the evolutionary tree why should it matter how we live or if we ever lived at all? At least that’s what some people seem to believe.

Still, there is that longing in the human soul that thirsts for significance. It seems a universal trait that **people want to live lives that matter.** Across history, cultures, language, people long for lives that mean something. There is an ache in our souls for understanding why we are here. That is because we, humans, are a special creation; the direct result of divine intervention in the natural order. We have been created in the image of God.

Humans hunger for meaning and purpose, they hunger for truth and justice and long to create beauty and yearn for eternity because God gave us those impulses. Product of the divine hand we are incessantly longing for a life and a realm that is

beyond this world. Instinctively we know that this world as it exists now, broken, bruised, off-kilter, is not the world we were meant to call home.<sup>1</sup>

Humanity's attempts to satisfy these longings have always fallen short. **The best efforts to create the most just and compassionate societies**, which promise to overcome greed, selfishness, and corruption, **continue to fail**, generation after generation. All the promises of personal satisfaction and fulfillment that are touted by materialism (getting the most, best, and latest stuff), hedonism (getting the most pleasure possible) and power also fail to satisfy. And their opposite, self-denial, doesn't cut it either.

So why do people keep trying to fill their souls from these empty wells? We can't give up the quest ... it's rooted in us. We want a better life, a better world, and we keep trying the only ways we know how to achieve it. But **we're swimming against the current of our own fallen nature**. Humanity has had more than 10,000 years in which to create the perfect man and woman and perfect society and it hasn't happened yet. And so the ache in our souls continues.

Technology has given us vast amounts of data and information at our fingertips. But all that information does not necessarily bring wisdom. Science can tell us the how, what, and when of our world, but it can never tell us who and why. And that's where we find the answers to our ultimate questions about life.

## **Salvation at Hand**

Sophisticated technocrats and know-it-all politicians encourage us to ignore spiritual answers for life's questions. That's why human attempts to create utopia always fail. The triumph of science and technology cannot produce wisdom, nor can they heal the soul and the brokenness of our human condition. That is because the greatest, most pervasive and deadly ailment we have all experienced is sin, which causes all the brokenness in our lives. Sin is to live life as though we need no connection to our Creator. **Sin is to make God irrelevant to living.**

*Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?* (Isaiah 53:1). It seems implausible to so many, even if it is true: that the babe born at Bethlehem entered this world of ours to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. As hard as we try we can't get to God, so God came to us. We cannot save ourselves so God came to save us. We are created in the image of God our Creator, but sin has marred that image so thoroughly that the wholeness and goodness we yearn for remains beyond our reach.

This Savior, born in Bethlehem, brings us salvation from our predicament. He entered our life, lived as one of us, bore our grief and pain, and took our sin and brokenness to the Cross where it all died with Him. Then He rose again to life to show that sin and death do not have the final say. *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain ... But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed,"* Isaiah 53: 3, 5.

Salvation comes from the Latin "salvare," from which we get our word "salve," a healing cream or ointment. Jesus is the salve that brings relief and healing to the pains of life that result from sin. All of His miracles of physical healing were illustrations of

the greater healing He would accomplish on the Cross. **He bought us healing ... healing in the deepest recess of the human soul where sin has taken root.** He is like chemo, radiation, and surgery all wrapped into one, eradicating the cancerous death of sin.

A savior can rescue us from difficulties or destruction. A savior can “pull our fat out of the fire.” This Savior is the only One who can rescue us from the destruction of sin. When He was lifted up on the cross he took on all the natural consequence for all the sin of all people, and put it to death there. Drawn into Him we can be healed of all the sin that is destroying us. **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” John 12:32.**

What the world needs most is not a little bit of love but serious surgery to excise the sin that metastasizes like a cancer. **This Savior went to the cross to cut out the power of sin and death.** Take yourself to the foot of the Cross and there give your sinful life to Him. Amiable religiosity or therapeutic deism won't do it; it'll never cleanse you of the sin that keeps you from the reality of redemption.

Left in sin, without the redemption of this savior, we are left in the shadow of the ways of the world ... the ways of personal gain at all costs, which is the source of all greed, cruelty, evil. It is the way that has turned its back on God. In the shadow of the world's ways we simply trudge through life in obscurity, just another cog in the wheel of time that is rolling us toward oblivion.

### **Freed For Significance**

But when Christ frees us from sin, even our most mundane, daily choices are infused with meaning and purpose, each one rippling out from us in the lives of others and into the future. Living as His new man or woman we become actors in the great, divine drama of redeeming humanity from the shadow that sin and death have cast over all human endeavors. This is dramatically seen in the lives of graduates of the Mission at Kern's recovery programs; but **Jesus' saving work is going on in your life and mine all the while.**

We want to relieve pain, and He comforts us. We cannot find the peace we seek, so God gives us His grace. By His divine workings even our suffering works together for good. We yearn for justice and He will set everything right in the end. We long for a future beyond the grave and He is there waiting for us. This is what our Savior has done for us.<sup>2</sup> This Jesus (the One who saves) lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, on Good Friday became a living sacrifice for our sins. **“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed,” 1 Peter 2:24.** Three days later he was clothed in a spotless glowing robe, risen from the grave, conquering sin and death.

**What can this savior do? He can heal your sin-sick soul and free you from aimless living.** He can lift you from aimless obscurity to creative significance. He can transform time, your time, and bridge the chasm between the awesome holiness of the eternal and the brokenness of your condition. He can give you courage and strength where you thought you had none, so that you can carry the responsibility of shepherds in the Spirit and manner of Christ. ... *they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*

**The people living around you don't even know they are lost, they don't know who they are, nor to whom they are meant to belong. They yearn for identity, belonging, and purpose and look for it in many lesser things than the glory for which they were created and into which, even now, God desires they be redeemed. Jesus has called on us to tell the Good News of Him, the real Savior.**

**In Jesus... "The timeless has entered into time, for the purpose of transforming time, so that the chasm between the great beauty of the eternal and the brokenness of the human condition might be overcome."<sup>3</sup>**

**Jesus is our heavenly Father's gift to all who suffer, doubt, long for a better future, and meaning in their life. This gift of a true Savior is meant for you, if you'll have it.**

**Joy to the world our Savior reigns! No more let sins and sorrows grow!**

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Burkhart, "Let Us Go Now to Bethlehem," *Five Questions of Christmas: Unlocking the Mystery* (United Methodist Pub. House, Nashville, TN, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Erling Duus, *The Tragic Sacred Ground*, 1988