

Let the sun arise in the firmament, and there is no need of witnesses to prove and confirm unto a seeing man that it is day. ...It is all one, by what means, by what hand, whether of a child, or a church... the Scripture comes to us; come how it will, it hath its authority in itself ...and hath its power of manifesting itself ...from its own innate light.
--John Owen

BENJAMIN KEACH'S CATECHISM

(Presented here as originally published – this does not constitute a full endorsement of the Riverside Baptist Church)

Q. 105. What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is the organized society of professing believers, in all ages and places, wherein the Gospel is truly preached and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper rightly administered. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Acts 7:38; Eph. 4:11,12)

Q. 106. What is the invisible church?

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head. (Eph. 1:10; 1:22,23; John 10:16; 11:52)

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Sunday Morning Bible Study -- 10:00 AM

Sunday Morning Worship -- 11:00 AM

Prayer and Bible Study Wednesday Evening 6:30 PM

WCWV 92.9 FM – 8:00 AM Sunday Morning

THE RIVERSIDE BAPTIST REPORT

THE RIVERSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Pillar and ground of the Truth” -- 1 Timothy 3:15

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O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Micah 5:2

The familiar carol stirs various thoughts in the minds of many. My own associations with it hearken back to childhood and its traditional appearance in the songs of the season. To some, it is no more than that. Others recognize it as a reference to the birthplace of Jesus. But in this age where Bible literacy is at a low point it may mean little to them. It is doubtful that many have any idea of the geographical location or the history of this most significant little town. To the worshiping believer it is the place where God was manifested in the flesh and the expectation of the Old Testament scriptures came to pass.

This season of the year witnesses the observance of many traditions and practices. Much of it is the invention of men or is derived from ancient paganism. Yet, the name of Christ is brought to the attention of many and for that we rejoice. There is no mandate in the Word of God for a celebration such as we see. That begs the question. Is the birth of Christ to be celebrated? Of course! But it is a matter of continual celebration to true believers everywhere in that their salvation depended on Christ coming into the world. The thoughts of many are turned at this time (even if it is the wrong time) to the birth of Christ, we would endeavor that the Gospel may be heard and seen above the traditional trappings and so we declare that “God was manifest in the flesh.”

There are many prophecies concerning the birth of Christ found in the Old Testament all of

which have been realized. We would call attention to some aspects of this one. We would note three things that the Lord declared through the prophet. First was the fact that Bethlehem was to be the physical birthplace of Jesus our Lord. The passage further relates to the eternal origin of Son of God who would be manifest in the flesh. And, it declares to us the purpose of God in sending Him into the world in this manner.

The word “Bethlehem” means house of bread.” The word “Ephrata” means place of fruitfulness. The significance of these names is not lost to us. This ancient little town was to be the place where He, who would be called the “bread of life,” should come into the world. It was there that the shepherds were feeding their sheep and even this speaks to us of the providence of God as it was an essential part of the plan of God that they should receive the news of the birth of His Son from the Angels. We are reminded of the words of John: *And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. John 1:16.*

The role of Bethlehem in history is prominent with regard to Christ our Lord. It was at Bethlehem that Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, died. It was there that her son Benjamin was born. She would have named him Benoni (son of my sorrow); Jacob gave him the name which meant “son of my right hand.” Even there it was the birthplace of hope out of sorrow for Jacob. Ruth and Boaz were married in

Bethlehem. Their son Obed was born there, and he was the grandfather of David. Of course, David himself was born in Bethlehem.

It is interesting that Bethlehem is personified here by the address “thou Bethlehem” and is thus indicated as essential to the whole purpose of God. So, it would be that when the fulness of time was come that, by the providence of God, Mary, the shepherds, and the angels would convene at this most sacred scene wherein “God was to be made manifest in the flesh.” Jerusalem had the Temple, but Bethlehem had Christ the King.

From where did He come? The text declares that “His goings forth have been from everlasting.” The scriptures declare Him to be God’s Son of Eternal generation. He is the only begotten and has always been God the Son. We don’t try to explain it – we believe it. It is with great awe and reverence that our hearts are often drawn to the words of the Psalmist: *I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Psalms 2:7.* He has come from the place of participation in all the eternal decrees. People were identified, needs were determined, covenants were established, and He came forth to fulfill all.

His goings forth have been noted. He was there in the Garden. He spoke with Abraham.

He made promise to Jacob and wrestled with Him. He personally gave the Law to Moses. He went before Joshua in the conquest of the Land. He appeared with the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace.

We would further note that He was sent of God that He might come forth out of Bethlehem unto Him – that is to God. He was brought forth as the King. *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. Psalms 2:6.* He was brought forth as a King before God and He was God. His reign was then and immediately declared. He has conquered for us as Prophet, Priest, and King. His reign is now, and He is expecting until His enemies be made His footstool. It was that in coming forth unto God He would bring us to God – howbeit by way of the cross.

In the fourth verse of this chapter we read “And He shall stand and feed (margin: rule) in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God...” It is to the delight of His children that He dwells in their hearts. This joy in the hearts of His people is not seasonal; it is eternal and so is its increase. It is not mere tradition; it is life evermore in Him. “O Little Town of Bethlehem” it was in thee that “God was manifest in the flesh” and “...of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end...” *bhs*

PRAY THANKFULLY – James W. Beeke and Joel Beeke

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.” —Psalm 136:1

It is everyone’s duty to give thanks to God. Being thankful to God is to acknowledge that He has acted graciously toward us. This is not a requirement only for those exercised at deeper levels in their prayer life, or only for established Christians. God requires thankfulness from everyone. “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

First, we are to be thankful for mercies received—“our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life” (Belgic Confession of Faith). We are not only to be thankful when we receive remarkably clear answers to prayer. We are also to be thankful for the things we receive for which we did not ask. Imagine making a list of all the times we used our senses, physical strength, and mental abilities in one day. Think of the simple act of eating a slice of bread, of receiving the strength and muscle coordination to lift our hand, to chew, and to digest it. Perhaps we never specifically asked God for these blessings or for thousands of others today, but God graciously gave them to us anyway.

Second, we are to be thankful for trials endured. We must not only be thankful for clear answers to prayer and for blessings for which we did not pray, but our thankfulness must penetrate deeper: we are called also to be thankful for trials and tests (James 1:2), for those things that distress us, events that are not pleasant or comfortable or to our liking. Paul and Silas sang psalms in the inner prison—songs of praise to God when they had bleeding backs and shackled feet.

The subject of thankfulness highlights a common sore spot in prayer. We can pray thinking of the Lord as a “limited God,” not an “all-encompassing God.” What is the difference between an emergency phone number and that of a friend? The one you call only when you must, when you have no choice, only in times of emergency. But the other you love to call—when things are going well as well as when things are going badly.

Think of the ten lepers healed by Christ. Nine used the “emergency number” for God because they only wanted to be healed. But only one used the number of a friend. He returned to Christ, with a heart full of love, communion, and praise. The joy that exceeded the priest’s pronouncement that he was clean was the joy of his heart being full of love for Jesus Christ.

There is a difference between joy and thankfulness. Joy focuses more upon the blessings, but thankfulness focuses on the One who blesses. Scripture teaches us to count God’s blessings, as the old hymn states, to “name them one by one.” We are more prone to count our blessings by hundreds and to give thanks in bundles. In our busyness, we often ignore or trample on the God-given grass and lilies of the field! We rarely pause to see a flower’s beauty, or smell its fragrance. How many “flowers” in your life have you passed by, never noticing the love and beauty with which God clothed each one of them? Do we pause to thank God for His “flowers” petal by petal?

We are so prone to count our one or two troubles and so quick to dwell upon that one unkind word more than upon another hundred kind words for which we should be so deeply thankful. True thankfulness brings us close to the heart of God, to His love and grace. True thankfulness realizes that anything short of hell is grace. True thankfulness serves as a corrective lens—a lens through which we see God’s grace in all things. Have you ever seen a severely sick person who is deeply thankful for the care he receives? A very old, physically frail person who is deeply thankful that she has a clear mind? Or a dying person who is deeply thankful that he still has time to speak to his family? Such a person has learned something of the art of thankfulness.

Third, we are to be thankful for the absolute goodness and infinite mercy of God expressed in His actions toward us in both prosperity and adversity. “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.” We must give thanks for who God is, in all His dealings with us. To do this, we must understand something of who we are in relation to who God is. Then we begin to realize why this expression is repeated twenty-six times in Psalm 136! Does it also resound anew each day in your life? Is not our God a wonderful God? When you look back in your life, do you see that His mercy really does endure forever? Looking around you, do you observe that His mercy is surrounding you on every side? Does this not make your sin the more terrible and repulsive? How often are we guilty of not thanking the Lord, of ignoring and insulting Him?

Prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. Is thanking and praising God your heart’s desire, whether in adversity or prosperity? There is no greater blessing than receiving a truly thankful heart from God, and no greater joy than pouring out your heart to Him in thankful prayer. Pray thankfully.

"There is another that has made you, and preserves you, and provides for you, and on whom you are dependent: and He has made you for himself, and for the good of your fellow-creatures, and not only for yourself. He has placed before you higher and nobler ends than self, even the welfare of your fellow-men, and of society, and the interests of his kingdom; and for these you ought to labour and live, not only in time, but for eternity."

- Jonathan Edwards