

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2011, Part 7: After Christmas . . . lessons that abide

After the biblical Christmas in Luke 2:7, “she gave birth to her firstborn,” we noted in Bible class how the grace news of God becoming incarnate touched the lives of so many people in different age groups—young Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna. In this essay I close out this Christmas series by noting a few more principles related to how Christ determines the life or fate of every person:

Luke 2:34 And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed--³⁵ and a sword will pierce even your own soul-- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

The biblical Christmas is filled with grace, joy, wonder, amazement, the glorification and praising of God. Mary, the beautiful young doctrinal believer was treasuring the truths related to God becoming flesh, Luke 2:19. The shepherds “went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as has been told them.” Jesus’ “father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him” (2:33) The child would be the Salvation and Light of Revelation! What a thought! What excitement and wonder filled the air!

But then we move into very somber and horrid tones: e.g., This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many, to be a sign to be *opposed*, the result of which will be like a broadsword cutting through the soul of Mary, and that Child would be the central issue in revealing the true thoughts of every person—for good or evil (Luke 2:34-35). So after the beautiful melody of good news, great joy, Savior, salvation, peace, angelic and human praise, we hear death knells. Instead of the world accepting God’s grace gift with open arms, this Child would be opposed and there would be great conflict, pain, and evil as a result. This is all part of the biblical Christmas story. Not only is there grace and joy and blessing, there is also conflict, pain, and the need to make a decision about Jesus Christ. Christmas does not end after December 25th. Note again the issue that continues long after Christmas: “this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.” These words served to check natural undue expectations about the effect of the first coming of Christ and to provide lessons for every person.

We believers appreciate the rise, the exaltation, He alone has given us. He has brought us grace, forgiveness, love, faithfulness, and a thousand other boons. What a lifting up of us from the depths of sin and guilt to the heights of forgiveness, justification, and full acceptance by God Himself. What unbelievable exaltation we have received to be positionally seated in the heavenly places in Christ! Positionally, we have already been raised up with Him! (Eph. 2:6) What prospects of blessings in our own lives he lays before us all in the supergrace life to enjoy more than we could ask or imagine (Eph. 3:10). What an exaltation to go from being a child of Satan in the kingdom of darkness to be adopted as a son of God forever! He offers this rising to all both in time and in eternity. This was His original purpose in coming; a purpose which was only limited in its operation by the free will of man.

What about the “fall” and the “sign to be opposed”? We see this prophecy literally fulfilled throughout the life of Christ in gospels as well as in the prophecies of the stages of church history (Rev. 2-3). Just as Christ is set for the rising of everyone who would accept Him, He is set for the fall of each single person who rejects Him. Just as Christ exalted Peter, He also was the source of Judas’s destruction. Christ even said that it would have been better for Judas if he had not born. Better not to have been born then to be born only to reject Christ, commit suicide and be known as the betrayer of Christ through all of human history. The Jewish religious leadership rejected Jesus Christ, and after forty years of grace were destroyed in 70 A.D. Consider the two malefactors on the Cross. One accepted Christ and was promised by Him entrance into paradise with Christ that very day, the other rejected Christ and would spend eternity in the Lake of Fire with no chance of escape.

Christ is the issue in life. Christmas teaches us that He determines life for us, not just on Christmas Day, but for every day. This is the message of biblical Christmas. The biblical Christmas is filled with lessons not only on the Incarnation, but throughout our lives. We are indeed blessed and privileged to be the recipients of His grace—to be given a personal sense of destiny with the Unique Person of the Trinity. This is the true message of CHRISTmas and not just on Christmas. The biblical narrative extends throughout the year. This is why the perfect Word of God has the perfect biblical narrative of Christmas—a narrative, by the way, that is void of all of the commercialism that the kosmos celebrates; and a narrative that is *opposed* by kosmos diabolicus with all of its glitter and glitz. The biblical Christmas narrative is far richer and more meaningful to God and to each of our lives.

Merry *Christmas*,

Pastor Don