BEACON LIGHTS FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

"O Holy Night"

Star of the East

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The First and Second Advent

Christ was here!
Christ shall come again!

The meaning and significance of these two simple phrases is tremendous. The first advent realized all the hopes and prayers of the patriarchs for the Saviour whose coming was as the dawning of a new day over against total darkness. His humble birth in Bethlehem’s stable was the fulfillment of that promise God had given our first parents almost four thousand years before when He said that He would send a Saviour who would crush the serpent’s head and redeem His people. From this humble beginning rose up He who would bear our punishment and through whose blood the sins of all of God’s people would be blotted out. Truly, young people, this first advent of Christ is worthy to be commemorated by setting aside a day in which we dwell on that miracle of God’s grace . . . whereby a virgin conceived and bare a son who was Immanuel.

But does it end here? By no means! If it ended here, we as Christians still would have no comfort for we continually look forward to the promised second coming of our Redeemer. Then we shall be taken from the world of our pilgrim-
for the coming of the Christ. And, dear friend, shall it not be so again when the Lord returns to earth? Again, Christ shall come in the fulness of time. We may be sure that evil will be flourishing then also, for we read in Matthew 24:24 “For there shall arise false Christ, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Going still deeper, in His birth we see the great gift of God, in that He sent His only Son to suffer and die, that we might be saved.

All this the world seeks to cover up, by its accentuation on worldly pleasure and worldly customs during the Christmas season, because of its hate for Him who by His advent destroyed all their happiness and frivolity. Are we to be taken in by this godless and Christ-less Christmas? Indeed let us not be! Instead let us throw off the world and its foolish celebrations and look back to the first advent and in looking back, also look forward to the second coming of our Lord, which is to result in our perfect and complete glorification.

If we as Christians, and as Protestant Reformed youth, will understand the true meaning of Christmas, there need be no fear of our placing any emphasis on the worldly celebration of that blessed day.

Know the greatness of that occasion!
Know the bounteous grace which was manifest there!

Sinless and perfect God came down to earth in the form of sinful flesh. The Almighty God gave His Son that He might be killed for the sins of His creatures. We, who also rejected and killed Christ, are made the partakers of the salvation and glory of God.

Oh yes, Christ suffered even on the day of His birth. On the day of His birth, He was rejected. And yet He was and is THE KING. That He was THE KING was very evident from the fact that He did not have the appearance of any other king. He who was wrapped in swaddling clothes instead of royal purple, He who was born in a stable instead of a palace, He who fell asleep in a manger instead of a jewelled cradle, He who was honored by shepherds instead of nobles and princes. Yes, this Man, rejected by the whole world, was King of kings. How do we know that this Man was the KING, the Messiah, whose coming was prophesied in Genesis 3:15? By the signs of his humble birth. And because we realize that these signs were evidences of the kind of King Jesus was, a king whose kingdom was of heaven, we are happy for these signs and do not want to change them.

Yet we must understand that we too, as we are in ourselves, rejected Him. As we are according to the old man of sin, we also with Herod pursued Christ, trying to kill Him. Finally we did crucify and kill Him. Yet, only as we are in Him whom we slew, do we love Him, follow Him, and become willing to die for Him.

Does not therefore Christmas also point out to us the second advent of Christ when He shall come to receive us unto Himself in final glory?

As the world tried to prevent the first advent of Christ, so it tries to prevent the second, knowing that then the cup of all iniquity shall have been filled and that then they shall receive their reward. For the second coming shall differ from the first. There will be no power given the world, then, to persecute and slay Him. They shall not even seemingly overcome Him because then He shall come as the Victor. He shall come on the clouds of heaven with power and great might. That He is the Son of God shall be undeniably apparent to all. The world who refused Him a place in which to be born, the world who rejected Him, scoffed at Him, spit on Him, and finally, with wicked hands, slew Him, shall now
recognize His Kingship and call for the mountains to fall on them.

In Christ’s second coming will be the perfect completion of God’s promise to Adam and Eve in Paradise when He said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

What a great and glorious God! Does He not finish what He has begun? From the promise to the elect in Paradise, to the cross on Calvary where the “heel of the seed of the woman was bruised,” to the final coming of Christ, when the head of the serpent is crushed in perfection, we can trace the completing of God’s promise.

Then as the youth of His Church let us celebrate Christmas with joy and gladness, but let not our celebrating be characterized by the deeds of the world. In all our celebrating may we praise God for His wondrous grace in that He gave us Jesus, THE SAVIOUR.

David Engelsma

**The Fulfilling of Hope:** For generations believing hearts were supported by the hope of Christ’s coming. The aged saint, Simeon, expressed the joy of all believers who know that Christ is the fulfillment of all hope. “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

To all our Readers . . .

We express our sincere best wishes for a joyous Christmas and a blessed New Year. May we ever praise God for that Wonder which He has performed.

The Staff of Beacon Lights
Bored to Tears?

Are you, young people? Do you feel uncomfortable in society and in special meetings which are held in the church? As soon as the meeting begins, do you wish it were over already? Or do you possibly try to find all kinds of excuses for not attending those meetings? Are you “bored to tears?” How do you plead, guilty or not guilty? If it is the former, just stay sitting in that comfortable chair and finish this article.

You know why I ask these questions, don’t you? You’ve heard the roll called in your society. Possibly there are 75 or 80, or even 90% “Here,” but where are the rest? Are they home, sick in bed? Come now, let’s put that on the bottom of the list of “reasons for being absent.” More than likely they’re bored and have found a good excuse for “skipping.” Maybe the basketball game is too good to miss. Possibly there is an interesting program that night. Or else it may just be a good night to stay home once. If I missed your favorite excuse, just add it to the list.

“Oh,” but you shout, “it’s no wonder we become bored. No one talks in society and they always put the same people on the programs.” Don’t get excited and just settle back in that comfortable chair again. Now, before we start blaming everyone else, let’s first talk about you. When was the last time you spent an hour or two studying the Bible outlines in preparation for the society discussion? You’re too busy, or it requires too much work? You mean to say you don’t study at all before coming to society? Then please do not blame anyone but yourself for your boredom. Or do you study and then come to society to see if the chairman can pry a word or two from you? Of course blaming others is the easiest way out. But don’t you think that there is just a wee little bit of a possibility that your actions, or rather lack of them, may be the cause of the boredom of others?

“To bore,” says Webster, “is to weary by tedious iteration or dullness, or by forcing one’s presence upon another.” You must admit that when young people get together, it is not normal that they become bored. They have too much to talk about and to much to do. They are so full of life that one has to try to slow them down rather than prod them on. Notice once at a basketball game how they cheer and shout. They don’t really care how their voice will sound tomorrow as long as it holds out tonight. And it certainly is abnormal to find a young person who doesn’t know what to do. He always has new plans and new ideas to carry out tomorrow. And did you ever notice how young people just can’t keep from talking? There’s not a moment of silence. Anything and everything is open for discussion.

What happens then in society when many of these same young people don’t utter a word? Those young people, who can’t be kept quiet otherwise, now seem to have lost the power of speech. What is wrong? What can the matter be? Surely, one would think, covenant young people will find their most fruitful and free discussions in the Word of God itself. Yet that does not always seem to be true. I think that there are at least
three reasons which might explain the source of trouble. Read them once and see if one or more are not true in your case.

In the first place, there is very often too much emphasis on all kinds of other activities. It's just the nature of the young person to desire to be active and doing things. For that very reason it is often difficult to sit down quietly for several hours to study and discuss the Word of God. Is that possibly why you don't come to society or come unprepared? You understand, I give this as a reason why such things occur, not as an excuse. We as young Christians are also pilgrims and strangers on this earth. The end or goal of our life is not pleasure and enjoyment. That doesn't mean that we cannot have fun, but that also in our fun we must glorify God. And we should consider it a blessed duty to set aside time to study the Word of God.

Secondly, one often does not discuss because he fears his presentation might be wrong. You'll have to admit that yourself. After all, what a boring discussion that would be if what everyone said was 100% correct. The purpose of a discussion is to present all the various possibilities and then to determine, if possible, which is correct. So what, if that which you say is wrong? Then you have added your bit to the discussion—and that is the important thing.

In the third place there is (do you dare to admit it about yourself?) a fear to speak of things religious. That seems to be especially true among the young people. We can talk about everything else under the sun, but when God and His wonderful work among His people is mentioned, then we shut up as tight as a clam. Why? Possibly it is because of a false sense of that which is religious. We feel unworthy to speak concerning such a worthy subject. We may think that it is rather presumptuous to talk about the Almighty God. Or maybe we feel we do not know enough about His Word to warrant our discussion about that Word. Shame on us, young people, if this is truly the case. Has He not wrought through Christ the wonder of wonders in our hearts? And are we then going to be afraid of talking about that? How can we possibly dare to keep silent?

Just stay in that easy chair a few minutes more; I'm not finished yet. You don't want to be bored any more? That's fine. You should be able to find a way to prevent it. First of all, and I should not need to repeat it, it is absolutely necessary to study diligently the lesson to be discussed. Don't say you have no time, don't say it's too hard; make time and do it. You do not know how to study? Then by all means get your October Beacon Lights, turn to page 11, and read “A Word of Explanation” by the Rev. H. C. Hoeksema. It should not be necessary to remind you that you should do more than merely read it. After you have formed your opinions, make it a point to discuss them in society. And don't come with that flimsy excuse that you are afraid to talk in a larger group. That you may have that fear, I do not deny, but you must make every attempt to overcome it. How? Why not try this? At your next meeting, without special urging from the chairman, speak at least once about some point in your lesson. The following week try it twice. Then three times. And be sure you do not give up after two or three weeks. Before long the chairman will have his hands full trying to keep everyone from talking at once. And when you go to society don't ever say to yourself: “Oh, another boring night ahead.” Go there with the purpose of learning something and I am sure you are nevermore going to be “bored to tears” again.

Another thing, every eligible (and I mean those within the constitutional age
limits) person in your church should be member of the society. A profitable meeting can be held with only five or even less members. But there is always a feeling of incompleteness if you know that there are some in your church who could be members but are not.

Never, never refuse to take part on the program either. I'm afraid that is why you so often are bored. You do not feel yourself a part of that particular meeting. I know, you don't think yourself capable, and you feel that you will detract rather than add to any program. Yet that is not true, and you know it. If everyone is willing to take the part assigned to them, then we will have some lively meetings in the future. And, you can be sure, no-one is going to be bored.

Finally, you can get out of that soft chair now and do something about this. Don't just lay aside this magazine and forget about all these things. Otherwise, come next society meeting, you are going to be bored again. Be diligent, be faithful, and you are going to enjoy your society.

We'll be seeing and hearing you at your next society meeting!

G. Van Baren

The manger!
O, the shame of it all!
She laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn!

When God comes into the world, when He sends His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, when Christ the Lord is born, the only place for Him in all the world is a miserable stable, the only cradle that can receive Him is a manger! O, it is true, it could not be helped. No one knew of His coming. Jerusalem was sound asleep. Bethlehem was crowded. The poor people of Bethlehem could not possibly have provided more room for the two travelers that arrived so late that there was even no room in the inn . . .

But, o, the shame of it!
Yet, what would you?

Would you come to Bethlehem, only to be indignant in your heart with a self-righteous indignation at the sight of the Babe in the manger? Would you judge that the royal palace in Jerusalem had been a better place for this Son of God in the flesh, and that royal purple should have taken the place of those swaddling clothes? Are you, perhaps, in your self-righteous and religious fervor and zeal, on the verge of calling in some social welfare agent to take this mother and this Child out of this stable, and to provide a comfortable lodging for them?

But wait! . . .

Do not destroy what God has wrought! For this stable and this manger are the divinely appointed place for this Child! True, circumstances determined it so, because there was no room for them in the inn! But God determined the circumstances. Here in this poor stable, in that humble manger, among the beasts of the field, on the very edge of the world, He sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law . . .

Do not destroy the sign, for it speaks! It proclaims that in your heart and my heart, in human society, in all the world, there is no room for the Son of God!

Until He makes room for Himself!
Glory to His grace!

"The Mystery of Bethlehem" by Rev. H. Hoeksema.

A Wonder to the Wise: These men of the East had long probed into the deep questions of life and eternity. Here before them was the answer—Christ, the Promised Messiah—The One of all the Ages, The One for all the Ages. This was the wonder: That all the questions and hopes of life should be bound up in this Child!
Preparation

The reason I wrote the last article in the Beacon Lights is to call your attention to the important place which the consistory occupies in the midst of the church of God. But I want to stress that the consistory is not something with which we as young people need not be concerned. But, even then, I am not really interested now in writing about your relation to your consistory, but I am writing about the problem that often arises in our churches when the annual nomination is made for consistory members. And I am writing about that problem as it concerns us as young people.

The problem has two sides. In the first place, the consistory is often faced with a problem of finding men for the nomination that are qualified for the office of either elder or deacon. In the second place, those whom the consistory considers qualified, do not often feel that qualification themselves. They ask to be left off the nomination because they do not think that they can take on the duties of the consistory properly.

Our young people look forward to take their place in the church as full confessing members. And especially our young men should look forward to an active place in the midst of the church. Part of that activity will be to serve in the consistory, for that is the highest place they can occupy in the church. And therefore it is a sad commentary on our young people, when they come into the church, and there are no qualified ones among them to serve as officebearers. And therefore the youthful years can be of utmost importance in their preparation for this.

I am not denying the fact that God calls to office, also the office of elder or deacon. The church belongs to Christ, and Christ is the office bearer in His church, for He alone rules over it. He has the power that is in the sphere of the church. He alone has the power of teaching, the power of ruling, and the power of discipline within the church. But He has chosen to exercise that rule through human men. That does not mean that He relinquishes that rule; but rather that He continues to rule through the agency of the consistory. And therefore He also calls to office. He calls those whom He has chosen to be the rulers in the midst of His church. But this calling to office, He does through the instrumentality of the consistory itself. That does not mean that He relinquishes the right to call to office, but that He exercises that power through men which He has chosen.

The consistory makes the nomination, and the congregation chooses, as servants of Christ, but according to the qualifications of the office as laid down by Christ in the Scriptures. They pick those men who are the most qualified to function in the office of elder or deacon.

It is a sad situation in the church when the consistory can barely find enough men in the congregation, who are sufficiently qualified to function in those offices. That is not the fault of the consistory. They are called to nominate only those who according to the Word of God can fulfill the duties which will be theirs. But it is a sad situation when the
consistory feels that men are qualified, and they come to the consistory with all kinds of reasons, not always pertinent, why they should not be on the nomination. It is possible that the consistory is unaware of certain things which would make a man unfit for office, but more than often, the excuses given are not valid.

It is therefore important that we as young people understand what it means to us to take this place in the activity of the church institute.

Therefore, in the first place, we should use the time of our youth as a preparatory course for that calling. All that we have talked about in past articles is relevant here. Societies and Catechism occupies a very important place in the preparation of our life. They occupy such a place, because, in their own way, they increase our knowledge of the Scriptures. For to know the truth of God's Word is above all things important. But our study of God's Word is not limited to these meetings; but must become a personal matter. To know the truth that we as churches maintain and develop, is above all things important. And in our study, we will then learn the importance, place, and duties of the officebearers in the church. We will understand the calling of these men and the place they occupy. We will know what is expected of us as officebearers and what our duties will be if God calls us to this holy office. It is therefore important that we walk a godly walk. The time to shun the world and to live holy lives is not for some future date, but must begin in our youth. Contact with the world of sin leaves an ineradicable mark upon our souls. Such is not preparation for the holy calling to serve as officebearers in the church of Jesus Christ.

Therefore to seek the office of elder and deacon is a worthy work. That does not mean that we play politics in the church of Jesus Christ; drum up support in the congregation; and campaign, as an aspirant does, to the office of the President of the United States; but it does mean that we live a spiritual life in the midst of the church, and deeply involve ourselves in the life of the saints with an earnest study of God's Word, and a sincere desire to serve God in whatever position He chooses to place us.

We would also make a few observations from a little different point of view. When a consistory places a man on nomination for the office of elder or deacon, it is not our calling to come with all kinds of petty excuses why we should not serve. We must remember that the nomination is already in a sense the call of Christ. For Christ calls from the nomination through the church, and therefore those who are qualified to be on the nomination, are also qualified to be called of Christ. That call cannot be lightly ignored or excused. The only question that faces us when we consider this nomination is whether our being chosen to the consistory will hinder the functions of that body and thus be detrimental to the welfare of the church in general.

We may feel that we are not qualified. That is not only natural, but a fruit of our deep realization of the seriousness of the calling. And therefore that is certainly good, when one feels that he is not able to function. But that one must remember, that when Christ calls to the office of his church, He calls sincerely, and therefore He also qualifies for the office. It is true that if our labors were to be successful, we could never serve. But because Christ calls and qualifies and blesses the labors of His servants, therefore they are fitted and enabled to serve. A petty excuse is wrong.

That does not mean that all men are so fitted to serve in the consistory. There are those who cannot and will not be (Continued on page 19)
Truth vs. Error

Our Confession of Faith

ITS AUTHOR

During the sixteenth century, many severe persecutions were launched against the Protestant Reformers. The strength of the Reformation was tried in its very infancy, and because the movement was born, not of men, but of God, grace was given in abundance to the people of God to faithfully endure this era of tempest. Many thousands of them lived from the principle, "Our backs we offer to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, rather than that we deny Christ." On this principle, the church thrived and because of it, many suffered martyrdom. To the latter belongs, also, the author of our Belgic or Netherlands Confession, Guido de Bray (Guy De Bres).

In this issue we wish to acquaint our readers with the author of the Confession which we will discuss in future issues. We must know how our cherished Confession was brought to birth. Knowing this, we, too, will more deeply appreciate this part of our Reformed heritage, which we are too frequently inclined to take for granted. And we may best learn of the origin of our Confession by perusing the life of the man whom God used to compose it. Although De Bres is not the exclusive author of the Confession, he is regarded as the principal one.

De Bres was born in 1522 at Mons. His mother, by whom he was reared, was a strict Roman Catholic. This early training in Catholicism, however, did not alter the fact that before he reached the age of twenty-five he had become a thorough Protestant. When persecution broke out in 1548, De Bres fled to England, where he spent four years. Upon his return he settled at Ryssel, where he won great popularity as a preacher. His ministry, however, was of short duration, for, four years later, his congregation was dispersed by a fresh persecution, and he was compelled to flee, going for a while to Ghent, then to Frankfort, and finally to Switzerland. Three years later, in 1559, he returned to Southern Netherlands where he established headquarters at Tournai, although he also again served Ryssel and Valenciennes. In disguise for safety's sake, he paid visits to Antwerp and Mons in behalf of the cause of the Reformed faith.

The next incident of importance occurred in 1561, when, in September of that year, the public singing of Marot's psalms gave rise to a judicial investigation, which again exposed Guido De Bres to new dangers. Undaunted, he, rather than fleeing once more for safety, undertook to secure justice for his comrades, by laying before the authorities, his Confession of Faith (the Belgic Confession) in Thirty Seven Articles, in the form of that adopted by the French Reformed churches in 1559. This Confession, according to A. H. Newman, was drafted by Guido de Bres before he was twenty years of age. Whether this is true, we cannot say; but it is not impossible, because this Reformer's entire life numbered only forty-seven years. In 1561 he used the Confession before the authorities, hoping to convince them that he and his friends were not revolutionary Anabaptists as they had been charged. His attempt, however, failed. It did not stop
the persecutions. It had this effect though, that it reached the public eye, and as is evident from frequent editions that were published, it met with wide-spread and popular approval; it won thousands to the cause of the Reformation, and it was soon recognized as a standard formula.

De Bres known identity, as author of the Confession, however, compelled him now to escape from Tournai to Amiens and from thence to Antwerp. Storm followed storm. In 1564 he was in Brussel for a conference with William of Orange, and took part in the negotiations at Metz for a union of the Lutherans and Calvinists. Then he found a refuge at Sedan, with Henri Robert de la Marck, Sieur de Bouillon; but two years later, he was called back to a post of danger by the consistory of Antwerp. In August of this same year he settled at Valenciennes, where by this time about two-thirds of the inhabitants were in sympathy with the Reformation. The governor's attempt to suppress the movement led to the siege of the city in December and its surrender in the following March. Once more De Bres attempted to flee but he and his fellow preachers were captured a few hours later at Saint-Amand and sent as prisoners to Tournai and then back to Valenciennes. There on May 31, 1567 he was executed. He was sentenced to be hanged in front of the town hall and thus ended a life full of toil and peril, which is one of the glories of the Reformation in the southern Netherlands.

THE CONFESSION

Concerning the Confession itself, it may be pointed out that it was originally written in the French language. Aiding Guido de Bres in its composition are such men as H. Saravia, professor of Theology at Leyden and afterward in Cambridge; H. Modetus, chaplain for some time of William of Orange; and G. Wingen. It was revised by Francis Junius of Bourges (1545-1602), a student of John Calvin, pastor of a Walloon congregation at Antwerp, and afterward professor of theology at Leyden. He abridged the sixteenth article (dealing with election) and sent a copy to Geneva and other churches for approval. Later the Confession was translated into the Dutch, German and Latin. Various Synods in the Netherlands, from 1566 on, adopted it. The most important of these is the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 which approved it and accepted it along with the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, as one of the symbols of the Reformed Churches in Holland and Belgium. It is interesting to note that the Arminians at this Synod objected to this. This is, of course, understandable. They demanded that parts of it be changed, but their demands were not granted by the Synod.

The Confession itself, in distinction from the Heidelberg Catechism, does not follow the subjective, experiential method of discussing the truth, but, rather, follows the dogmatic order. It treats, in order, the doctrines of God (Theology), Man (Anthropology), Christ (Christology), Salvation (Soteriology), Church (Ecclesiology), Last Things (Eschatology). The Confession treats, rather fully, the truths of the Trinity, the Incarnation of Christ, the Church and the Sacraments. Finally, Article 36 treats the matter of the relation between the church and the state and is based upon a conception prevalent at that time which is no longer accepted in its entirety.

D.V. we will begin next time to discuss all these truths contained in the 37 Articles over against the countless errors that seek to undermine the faith of the church.

G. VandenBerg
Helps for Bible Study
BOOK OF ACTS

Chapter 4

Introductory Note:

This chapter stands, of course, in close connection with the preceding one. The apostle Peter preached his second recorded sermon (not very likely only his second sermon, even though others are not recorded), emphasizing that the miracle of the healing of the lame man was a manifestation of the power of the resurrected Christ, Whom they had killed. And in this chapter we see both the positive and the negative fruit of his preaching, the latter consisting in a renewal of the open opposition of the Jewish authorities against the Christ,—something which does not seem to have become manifest between the crucifixion and this time. The chapter is important because it teaches something about the nature and characteristics of persecution and those who perpetrate persecution, because it tells something of the attitude and reaction of those who are persecuted; because it tells something of the effect and purpose of persecution upon the gathering of the church; and because it furnishes an example of the reaction of the church, at large, to persecution. And we surely must not fail to see, not only in regard to this first persecution as such, but also in regard to all that is connected with it, how the Lord in His infinite wisdom clearly guided and controlled all the events in the history of the church at this stage, so that His cause might not be defeated, but might grow and be established in Jerusalem and Judea before the fiercer storms of persecution began.

We may inquire into this chapter as follows:

A. The two-fold reaction to the preaching recorded in chapter three, vss. 1-4.

1. Negatively: vss. 1-3. Evidently while the apostles, Peter and John, were still speaking, the enemy came upon them and took them away.
   a. Was it a good policy for the apostles to carry on their work, as it were, right in the enemy’s camp? Was this not practically inviting trouble? Did they not know from their experiences while Jesus was on earth, that they would stir the wrath of the enemy, if they invaded the precincts of the temple to preach and teach?

   1) From a practical point of view, what was, undoubtedly, the positive reason for their going to the temple; and that too, (cf. chapter 3, vs. 1) at the hour of prayer?
   2) In reality, in so far as the idea and purpose of the temple were concerned, was not the apostles’ presence there, and their preaching of the Lord Jesus and His resurrection, entirely proper? Was it not, as the Lord Himself had said once, His Father’s house? And, from that same point of view, were not the enemies actually rebels and usurpers in that house? (Note: We may remember, of course, that with the cross and the rending of the veil of the temple, principally the “old things” of the temple and the temple-service had passed away. Nevertheless, for some time afterward this principal change was not fully realized, and, in fact, could not be realized in the minds and hearts of God’s people except through the preaching of the apostles and the
conversion of the people of God, from the old to the new, through the means of that preaching. There is, undoubtedly, an element of this kind later on, when the question concerning circumcision, and other aspects of the Mosaic law, arises in the church. Things were not actually changed all at once, — and could not be, — even though, principally, the change had taken place at the cross, where all the typical elements of the law were ended, through fulfillment.)

3) Is there any support here for the idea that it is the duty of the church and of the saints to seek persecution and to go out of their way so that they may suffer for Christ's sake?

b. Who came to arrest the apostles? We may note here that the first two terms, "priests and captain of the temple," denote official positions; the third, "Sadducees," is not the name of any officers, but denotes a religious movement, which at the time apparently had many adherents among those in authority in Jewry.

1) Who was the captain of the temple? Did he actually have authority to arrest, etc.? Did actions of the Jewish authorities have the sanction of the Roman government in any degree? Just what was the relationship and the division of authority between the Jewish officials and the Roman governor?

2) Why were the priests involved in this?

3) What were the characteristics and the doctrinal tenets of the sect of the Sadducees?

c. The reason for arrest is two-fold: they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. This, undoubtedly, accounts for the fact that at this time there is no bickering between Pharisees and Sadducees. Can you trace the connection here? Why were the Sadducees aggrieved? Why the non-Sadducees?

1) Did they have any real reason for feeling aggrieved?

2) What does the fact that they were grieved at these things reveal concerning the Jewish authorities?

3) How is it to be accounted for that the apostles’ preaching has this negative fruit? Is it sufficient to explain this merely by saying that the aggrieved parties hardened their hearts? Proof?

d. In verse 3 we are told that the apostles were forcibly taken away (they laid hands on them), and then jailed overnight for the reason that the arrest took place at eventide, when the council could not be conveniently called together, and, besides, when they were forbidden by law to hold a trial.

2. Positive fruit: vs. 4.

a. This evidently stands in contrast with the preceding, and indicates that the public arrest of Peter and John nevertheless did not hinder the positive effect of the preaching of the resurrected Christ. Does the term "believed" necessarily mean that all of these "many" were genuine believers? Cf. similar expressions, for example, in John 8.

b. Undoubtedly the number, "about 5000," does not mean that these were all converted at this occasion, but refers to the total size of the church including the many that believed after this miracle and the accompanying preaching. But assuming, as we may, that "men" is not to be taken in the general sense of "people" but as referring to male believers, how large approximately was the church at this time? What accounts for this rapid growth? Why does not the church grow by
such "leaps and bounds" today?

B. The Trial: vss. 5 to 12.

1. The Court, vss. 5, 6.
   a. Undoubtedly an official meeting of the Sanhedrin, involving not the Roman, but the Jewish authorities, as the general term "their rulers" indicates. This Sanhedrin consisted of three groups: the chief priests (mentioned in vs. 6, adherents of the Sadducees), the elders (representing various civil precincts), and the scribes (the legal experts). They always gathered at Jerusalem; hence, the reference to Jerusalem does not refer to the place of meeting, but rather to the fact that on such short notice only the council-members from Jerusalem were present.

b. Can you identify any of those who are mentioned by name? In view of their identity, do you suppose that they approached the present trial in complete ignorance of the case now before them and without prejudice?

2. The Trial as such, vss. 7-12.
   a. The examination:
      1) What question is asked of the two defendants? Why do they inquire about the "power" and the "name"? Had the Jewish authorities ever been interested in these same subjects before? When? Is it possible that, perhaps, they themselves thought of their accusation against Jesus that He cast out devils by Beelzebub?
      2) Does this question indicate ignorance of the accusations mentioned in verse 2, or is it simply a formal question, asked in order to get the case formally before the court?
      3) What do you think of this procedure of asking a question, instead of presenting and proving an accusation? Is it just? Does it become those who are supposed to be well-versed in the principles of justice according to the Mosaic law? Does it indicate any change of heart since the trial of Jesus?

b. The defense: vss. 8-12.
   1) Peter speaks again, even as in chapters 1, 2, and 3. By what power does he speak? Could a better "case" be presented for the defense? Can this defense, possibly, be gainsaid? Against whom do the council take action, in the light of this 8th verse? Think of the later accusation of Stephen, Acts 7:51. Can you connect the facts of verse 8 with any promise of the Lord exactly with respect to an occasion such as this trial?
   2) What facts does Peter emphasize in his account? vss. 9-12.
      a) Why does he refer to the "good deed done to the impotent man?" What does this same apostle say in one of his epistles about suffering for well-doing?
      b) Why does he again emphasize their guilt in the crucifixion?
      c) What reference to the O.T. is found in his defense? Where else is it similarly applied? How does this quotation emphasize their guilt?
      d) What is the chief thought of verse 12, and why does Peter emphasize this idea here?

C. Deliberation and Verdict: vss. 13 to 22.

1. Deliberation, vss. 13-17:
   a. What was the immediate effect of this speech upon the council? What factors led to this? vss. 13, 14.
      1) What is the meaning of "unlearned and ignorant men" in this connection?
      2) What does it mean that they "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus?"
      3) In what position did the presence of the healed man put the council? Was he, perhaps, imprisoned with Peter and John? What do the words
"could say nothing against it" reveal concerning the attitude of the council in this trial?
4) In the light of these facts what should have been the immediate verdict?
b. What did the council do instead? vs. 15.
1) Did they decide on a verdict?
2) In what dilemma did they find themselves? vs. 16, 17.
3) What did they decide? Criticize this decision. vs. 18.
c. What does this entire proceeding reveal concerning the attitude of the Jewish council?
d. Is it merely a happy coincidence that the council at this time did not do violence to the apostles, or can you trace the controlling hand of God in this outcome?

2. The Outcome, vss. 18-22:
a. What did the council do to the apostles? Was there any ground for this "sentence?"
b. What really moved the council to set them free? vs. 21.
c. What answer did the apostles give to the council, vs. 19, 20?
1) What is implied in the answer of vs. 19 as to the relation of the word of the council and the commandment of God?
2) Does this rule of "heeding God rather than men" apply to any case, even when civic authorities act in their own sphere? For example, if we deem a certain war to be unjust, may we on this ground refuse to fight when the government demands it?
3) What reason do Peter and John give in vs. 20 for their decision to "hearken to God?"
4) Why do they say in vs. 19, "judge ye?"
d. Why the reference to the healed man's age in vs. 22?

C. After Release, vss. 23-37:
1. Where did the apostles go after their release, and what did they do?
a. Why did they tell the saints about these events?
b. Were the saints in any way concerned other than for the welfare of Peter and John?
2. What was the reaction of the church at large? What did they immediately do? vs. 24, ff.
a. How did they interpret the events that had taken place?
b. Did they put a favorable or unfavorable interpretation upon them?
c. For what did they pray? Why did they not pray for freedom from persecution?
3. How did the Lord answer the prayer? vs. 31.
a. What does it mean that they were filled with the Holy Ghost? Had they not been filled with the Spirit already, before this?
b. Is there any connection between the place being shaken, and their being filled with the Holy Ghost?
c. Is there a special meaning in the shaking of the place, or was it merely, in general, a special manifestation that the Lord heard them?
4. Judging by the account in vss. 32, ff., did this initial persecution, and the threat of further violence, have any adverse effect upon either the church as a whole, or upon the work of the apostles?
a. What, instead, was the effect?
b. What characterized the life of the church at this time in regard to their temporal needs? Is there any possible connection between this and the persecution? What does it show concerning the Lord's care of His church?
c. What significance must be attached to the specific example of Barnabas?

H.C.H.
Instinct and Learning

In our study of the learning process of animals and human beings, we must be very careful so that we do not relate the two in such a way that we forget the fundamental differences between them. Man is a rational-moral being and as such, he is going to behave differently from the animal. According to Genesis, man was a separate creation and may not be rightly classified as an animal.

However, any of us who have made even a cursory study of animal life, if you have only butchered a frog, cannot help noticing many similarities in body structure between the human and animal kingdoms. This is even true to a much less degree for the relation between the plant and animal kingdoms. We are struck by this fact, just as the evolutionaryist is; but we do not therefore conclude that 'higher' forms of life have developed from 'lower' forms of life. Rather we marvel at the fact that God, in his creative design, used a common pattern with very marked variations . . . thus animal bodies, including our own, operate on the same principle. We all must eat food, breathe oxygen, and drink water. By a study of the bodies of animals; the effect of environment on them, heredity, food, etc.; we can glean much valuable knowledge for ourselves about the function and care of our own bodies. Even Solomon tells us to study the ant as an example of industriousness.

Thus, to a degree, we can also be instructed by a study of the learning processes of animals. If we bear in mind the essential differences in our creation and purpose, we will have little difficulty. Perhaps one of our greatest obstacles is that most of the research in this field has been carried on by Godless scientists.

Man is born with two sets of instincts which are ready for action as soon as he enters this world. Both of them are necessary for his earthly survival. The first set, attractions, would include the readiness to nurse and the readiness to cling with the hands. The infant must eat even though he requires much more parental guidance than the animals. Very young infants may sustain their own weight by the grasp of both hands about a cane held horizontally above them. The second set, or avoidances, would be the fear of falling and the fear of very loud noises. These four cover the immediate needs of the child and more are added later. It has been found, for example, that the fear of snakes is absent in infants. It is generally well developed at the age at which children run about alone; the age at which snakes might be a real danger to them. Thus, from infancy to old age, we continue to act automatically in the way that our ancestors have acted since time began.

Many of the lower animals are born educated almost to the full extent of their capacity, the possible lines of action of their whole lives being provided for entirely. A chicken flees at the first cry of a hawk although it may be quite unresponsive to the similar cry of a catbird. There is, however, especially in the 'higher' animals, a field of activity in which the reactions are less fixed, and here lies the opportunity for learning by individual experience. This is so large a part of our own life that we have difficulty in realizing how limited it is in many of the animals. Animals have two
principal modes of learning; by trial and error, and by imitation. Man can also learn by experiment.

Thorndike’s classical experiment, with a few young chicks and a wooden cracker box, is so simple that any one can manage it, and it is very good for showing the details of learning by trial and error. The box has two main compartments which are connected by a ‘U’ shaped passage through which the chicks cannot see each other. A hungry chick of two weeks old is placed in one compartment. Two or three others are placed in the other one and provided with food. The lone hungry chick can hear the contented eating of the others but cannot see them. It is his lesson to learn how to get to the others. His hunger and his liking for company may be depended upon to move him to make the effort.

His first efforts will be obviously aimless: trying to fly out and falling back; peering through crevices and around the corner; walking back and forth in all directions; standing; peeping; pecking at the walls and at the floor, etc. These will occupy so long a time that the observer who is watching and waiting, will marvel at his stupidity. He may even turn two of the three corners and return to try more walking and peeping; but when he goes far enough to see the other chicks he will run to them at once.

If at once returned to his own end of the box, it will be seen that he has not yet learned his lesson, for he will repeat most of the useless efforts of the first trial. His second trip through will generally be made more quickly than the first (the first may take an hour or more) and succeeding ones more quickly still, although there may be much irregularity.

Animals learn little by imitation. Learning to do as others do is so large a part of our education that it is difficult for us to realize how small a part it is of theirs.

Did you ever try to cover a cold dog with a blanket? Instead of getting under it, a dog will always get on top of the blanket with all his feet, and after turning around a few times, lie down there. His turning about is like that of his wild ancestors when making a lair in the grass: it is instinctive behavior.

Animals have inherited aptitudes; each has its own. A cat gives no heed to most of the things going on around her, but the sight of a canary or the sound of a mouse brings instant alertness and readiness for action. These stimuli have meaning for her; are related to her livelihood, and are purely instinctive and inherited.

In its beginning, imitation is very much mixed with trial and error. Learning to write, for example, is an imitative process; but if one watches a youthful learner, at the start he will be seen trying to guide his pencil blindly, making all kinds of lines by means of many kinds of movements of hands and shoulders and feet, with turnings of head and furrowings of brow. Slowly the curves are mastered, the proper muscles are brought under control and the useless motions eliminated. After a time it is no longer necessary to give thought to the movements of the pencil. Reaction paths become established: the curves run into words automatically, while the mind is concerned only with the thoughts that the words convey. Thus the uppermost seat of the brain action is relieved of routine and released for the mastery of new undertakings.

All this helps us to understand the great gulf that is fixed between us and the animal world. We alone have the mind for doing as others do: our education consists largely in learning to imitate others.

The method of learning by experiment is peculiar to human beings. This involves both control of conditions and consideration of results. Animals may

(Continued on page 21)
"Glory to God in the Highest"

Once again, the month of December, a month that is so significant in the life of a Christian, is come upon us with its many joys and happiness. Around about us we see everyone hustling and bustling, making plans for the holiday. The business districts are over-crowded with everyone buying gifts for friends and loved ones, family gatherings are being planned around large holiday dinners and everybody is filled with the spirit of Christmas.

When we look at Christmas with its family gatherings, large dinners, gifts and brightly lighted trees, we find that we are completely missing the real true and glorious meaning of which the day is a symbol. To find real Christmas joy we need only to go to the Scriptures and read the glad tidings of great joy: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Such was the brief but tremendously significant gospel of what God had done for the salvation of His people. The world may change the joy of the day, that unto us is born a Saviour that is able to remove the fear of sin and death from our souls, into a rejoicing in the things of the earth. Let them hide this heavenly joy under the worldly idea of Christmas joy. Nevertheless, its joy cannot remove the fear of our sin, nor can it cleanse the heart from sin and deliver our soul from death and condemnation.

Its joy is not the joy of the gospel. "For unto you is born a Saviour!" This is the real true spirit of Christmas. And what is a Saviour? As Rev. Hoeksema has so ably explained it in one of his books, "It is one who is able to deliver us from the greatest evil; one who is not only fully able, but who also surely shall deliver His people from all their misery. And what is that greatest evil? It is that which causes our hearts to tremble with miserable fear of condemnation and damnation in the presence of the Lord. It is our guilt and our sin, our corruption and our death, our hatred and enmity against the Most High, our darkness and foolishness, our being in the power of the devil and in the slavery of unrighteousness. A Saviour is one who, while delivering us from that greatest of all evils, will make us partakers of the highest good. And what is that highest good? It is all that lies at the root of that great joy of which the angel speaks, of that joy which we may experience in the presence of the Lord. It is to be cleansed from sin and clothed with righteousness, to be delivered from the power of the devil and to be subjects of Him that purchased us with the precious price of His blood. It is righteousness and holiness, love, life, light, and eternal glory. It is to taste that the Lord is gracious and to dwell in the fellowship of His covenant-communion, to know Him as we are known, to love Him because He loved us, to see Him face to face and behold His beauty. It is to be heirs of the heavenly Kingdom." Such is the joy of Christmas; and seeing it in this light, we as Christians may rejoice and be glad giving praise and Glory to God in the Highest.

John H. Haan
Regional Staff Report

The young people of our Creston Church held a Singspiration in their church for the purpose of getting funds to cover the cost of a recorder which they hoped to purchase. This recorder is to be used to bring sermons to the shut-ins and other uses. We were led in singing by Chuck Westra, a most capable director.

During the course of the evening we were favored with various special numbers. The "King's Ambassadors," which consist of: Chuck Westra, Jim Schipper, John Bult, and Don Faber, sang for us, accompanied by Jim Jonker. Also the Male Quartet from our Hope Church sang. There was an instrumental duet by Henrietta DenBesten and Jane Timmerman of our Second church.

The collection taken gave our Creston young people a big help in their efforts and I am sure we all spent a very enjoyable Sunday evening singing praises to our Maker.

* * *

Our speaker for the evening was student A. Mulder, who spoke to us on the topic: "God's Promise of Truth: Its Testimony in History." His speech was both interesting and beneficial to us as young people. This is a short summary of the things he said:

"Tonight we are concerned with a portion of history, in fact, the newest portion there is as of right now. And history, we know, is the unfolding of the counsel of Jehovah. This does not unfold arbitrarily but rather purposefully. That purpose is to lead His Church with Christ as Head into all Truth so that God is glorified forevermore."

"The most tremendous comfort to us is that we know that the knowledge of Truth not only lived, and lives, but that it shall always continue to live in us. Hence we celebrate reform. It is the Churches' possession—the gift of God. The Church, and she alone owns it; understands it; and experiences it. She alone celebrates it; and she alone connects it with history."

Our annual Reformation Day Mass Meeting was held this year at our Hope Prot. Ref. Church. Jim Schipper opened the meeting with prayer, and led us in the singing of a few numbers from our Psalter. We were then favored with a number from the "King's Ambassadors" and the Hope Male Quartet combined; they were accompanied by Jim Jonker.

"Knowledge of Truth is the knowing and experiencing of the beautiful Scriptural truths and then seeing clearly the story of God as He reveals it to His church in history."

"Why is there this knowledge? Simply by Promise, and this is essentially the entire purpose and plan revealed to the Church."
“How is there a knowledge of Truth? Simply by fulfillment of that promise. So it is with the Reformation. An event in the Counsel of God wherein unrighteousness strove to corrupt Truth, and made itself guilty before God, yea excusable unto death, and died—given as a ransom for truth; then truth enveloped forth much more clearly developed, shining in beauty, for the Church of all ages to see that the promise of God still operates and will continue so to operate by His word and spirit for His Church.”

Mr. Mulder went on to explain the historical divisions of the Reformation, the conflicts involved, and the testimony of truth in Luther. “The promise of God, as He speaks it in the hearts of His people of all ages, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and by His spirit, led Luther. And so too He will guide us into all truth and show it unto us. God’s promise concerning Truth remains upheld by Him and carried out by Him. And its testimony stands as a beacon for His church.”

We were then favored with a piano solo by Mary Pastoor from our First Church. After recess we enjoyed an instrumental number by Bob and Mary Decker, both from our First Church. Then followed an exciting debate on the topic: Resolved that physical contact sports are morally wrong. Agatha Lubbers and Fran Flikkema took the affirmative and Dwight Monsma and Rich Van Baren the negative. The negative won the debate according to the decision of the judges.

Rev. McCollam closed our meeting with prayer. As usual, the real debate took place outside after the meeting was over, but we young people always enjoy each other’s company and arguments. We all enjoyed this Mass Meeting and are looking forward to our next one.

Ruth Dykstra
Michigan Reporter

—Selected

**PREPARATION**
(Continued from page 8)

able to function as elder and deacon. And that does not even mean that it is due to their own unspiritual life. God has never given all the talents to occupy this place. But it does mean that the fault often lies with us. We do not show sufficient interest in the things of the kingdom of heaven and the affairs of the church to prepare ourselves intellectually and spiritually for this office of Christ.

We as young people should realize that this place we may be called to occupy, and that the church of Jesus Christ is worthy of our best efforts, and, therefore, our best preparation, which begins in our youth.

H. Hanko
"With my Song will I Praise Him"

It’s Christmas time. Down the dark, silent, snowy streets go groups of young people. Singing softly, they go from one home to another, ring the doorbell, sing a song or two and depart. In homes throughout the nation families gather around the piano to sing these songs proclaiming the birth of our Lord and Saviour. In church and in programs we sing or hear them sung again. Amid the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping we often hear them from loudspeakers inside and outside of almost every department store. These songs are carols. The number of them is large, the origins are different and varied, and the types are many. Yet the aim and theme is one—praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonder He has wrought in sending down His Son into our sinful flesh that He might redeem us from sin.

The origin of the word “carol” is uncertain. Some say it comes from the word “carolare,” originally denoting “a dance accompanied by singing.” In early religious rites worshippers joined hands and danced in a circle as they sang together. Others believe that “carol” may be derived from the Greek word for flute player, referring to the musician who accompanied the singing dancers.

After the pagan winter feast had merged with the Christian, the people still danced around nativity scenes to tunes known as carols. Early carols have characteristics of true folk poetry—simplicity and joy. Some are a curious combination of the sacred and profane, while others are rather naive or even absurd. St. Francis of Assisi is usually credited with being the “Father of the Christmas Carol,” for from him came a new idea of jovial singing of praise.

Our carols really date from the 15th century. At this time, there was a distinct growth in the “democratic spirit of music” and some began to express their own feelings regarding church music, preferring to sing in their own tongues, instead of the Latin.

To cover the sources of all the carols would be impossible, for the origin of many is unknown or shrouded in obscurity. We do know about some of the more familiar ones, however.

The organ of the little church of Arnsdorf near Salzburg, Austria, in the last days before Christmas, 1818, had become unfit for use. This troubled the parish priest, Father Josef Mohr. He felt that now the people should have something special for the Christmas mass. Late on the evening before Christmas Eve, he paused on a hill overlooking the town. Here and there a faint light glimmered in the dark and over all was a vast stillness. Musing, he said, “It must have been something like this that silent holy night in Bethlehem.” Powerfully affected, he hurried home and wrote the words of “Silent Night.” The next day he showed them to Franz Gruber, the church organist, who wrote the music for them. That Christmas, with Father Mohr singing and Gruber playing his guitar, the enthralled people heard the first rendition of this beautiful and perhaps best loved of all carols.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” is perhaps the best known American carol. It was written by Bishop Phillips Brooks, who left his church for a year to go abroad and tour the Holy Land. On Christmas Eve, in 1865, he rode out to Bethlehem, saw the shepherds in the fields and below him in the starlight the “little town of Bethlehem.” The scene was stamped upon his memory, never to be forgotten. He returned to America and three years later wrote his song for the annual Sunday School program. The church choir director and organist, Lewis
H. Redner, wrote the accompanying music.

Tradition has it that the carol “Away in the Manger,” both words and music, was written by Martin Luther for his little son Hans, one Christmas eve. Authorities, however, doubt this for two reasons. First, the style of this song is entirely different from anything else that Luther wrote. Secondly, this hymn is not familiar to the German people. It is said that Luther did sing his child to sleep and that some writer has imagined this song to be the type he would have sung.

The origin of another familiar carol, “O Come All Ye Faithful,” translated from the Latin “Adeste Fideles” is somewhat controversial. The words, translated into English by Frederick Oakley in 1841, are said by some to have been written in the 13th century by the Bishop of Albano. Others say it is a graduale, or responsive anthem, of the Cistercians, an order of monks. The music, called the Portuguese Hymn, is credited to Vincent Novello and Marco Portogallo, the chapel master for the king of Portugal.

“Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” was written by Charles Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist denomination, author of 6,000 or more hymns. This carol, it is said, was inspired when he was walking to church one Christmas Day and was thrilled by the joyous chiming of church bells in London. The music with which it is commonly sung was arranged from Mendelssohn by William H. Cummings in 1850, over a hundred years after the words had been written.

These carols, coming from different parts of the world, written under different circumstances, written in different times and in different languages, show to us that God’s church is universal, gathered from every nation and tongue. His church is a holy catholic Church which “the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word . . . chosen to everlasting life.”

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Jim Jonker

Let

rich and

poor and great

and small the birthday of THE King recall.

’Tis not the tinsel bought

so dear will make His kingdom

soon appear, but trusting Him

within the heart to wipe away the

stain of sin who paid the price in

dearest blood to open up our way to God

so let

our

anthems

ring

with joy

Let heart and tongue

His praise employ to

Sing our hallelujah

clear; salvation doth

in Him appear. ★ ★

— Selected

INSTINCT AND LEARNING
(Continued from page 16)
choose, in a way. Your dog may choose between two well known paths by which to return home. But I do not believe that he will reflect on the consequences of his choice. In learning by experiment, consideration of the results of an action involves not only the immediate results but also the consequences that are more remote. Morality comes in here also. Man is infinitely imitative, imitating everything. Man is reflective, considering gains and losses. Man is occasionally inventive.

Dwight Monsma
“Christmas Traditions”

Scripture does not record for us the exact date nor the time of the year of Christ’s birth. Nor did the Apostles or the early Church celebrate the Birth of Christ. It was the Romish Church, already apostatizing in the early part of the fourth century, A.D., which affixed Christ’s birthday on the twenty-fifth day of December, the exact date of an annual pagan Roman feast, in order to pacify the heathen, and to swell the numbers of the nominal adherents of Christianity. Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostacy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant was submerged under pagan superstition, which is so true also in our present age. Even in the Colonial period of U.S. history, many of the New England colonies outlawed Christmas celebrations and even declared the twenty-fifth of December as an ordinary work day.

That Christmas was originally a pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year and the traditions with which it is still celebrated in our day, prove its origin. At the time of the winter solstice the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Romans held huge feasts to their pagan idols. Also the worshippers of the sun, moon, stars, and planets, held a feast honoring the completion of the sun’s yearly course, and the beginning of a new cycle. The Christmas tree, so common nowadays, was equally common in Pagan Rome and in Pagan Egypt. In Egypt that tree was the palm, denoting the Pagan Messiah as Baal lamas. In Rome, it was the fir tree referring to him as Baal Bealt. The mother of Adonis, the Sun God and great mediatorial divinity of the Greeks and Phoenicians, was mystically said to have been changed into a tree, and when in that state, to have brought forth her divine son. If the mother was a tree, the son must have been recognized as the “Man, the branch.” And this entirely accounts for the putting of the Yule Log into the fire on Christmas Eve. This is also the reason that Christmas is commonly called Yuletide. Yule is the Chaldee word for “infant” or “little child.” Likewise the Christmas candles (electric lights in recent years) were equally lighted by the Pagans on the eve of their festival of the Babylonian god to do honor to him. Also the traditional Christmas Boar and Goose stems from the ancient Babylonians. They merely offered these creatures and sacrifices to their pagan idols. The wassailing bough and the mistletoe bough, and many other of the traditions still observed in the twentieth century came from the Babylonian Pagans. Even Jeremiah 10:1-5 sheds some light on this matter.

The giving and receiving of gifts dates way back to 747 B.C., when the Romans exchanged greetings and gifts to their kinsfolk and acquaintances in honor of their heathen god, Janus. The early Anglo Saxons of Europe observed a similar custom in the early centuries, A.D., and that custom is still continued to this very day. The custom of sending Christmas cards to one’s friends originated in England in 1846; however, it was not until eighteen years later that the custom became popular. Santa Claus is a German corruption of the name, St. Nicholas—who lived in the fourth century A.D. St. Nicholas learned that three young women had no suitors, as their father was too poor to provide them with a dowry. So one night he filled three bags with gold and threw them into the windows of the rooms occupied by the girls, and they were soon happily married. Unexpected gifts were thereafter said to come from St. Nicholas. His feast day occurs on December 6 and not on December 25, the celebration of Christ’s birthday, in Germany and Europe in
general. In the course of time, St. Nicholas came to be described as the giver of Christmas gifts. The myth, that Santa Claus descents the chimney to fill the stockings, comes from the Norsemen. They believed that at the winter solstice, the goddess Hertha appeared in the fireplaces in their great halls and brought with her happiness and good fortune. The Santa Claus myth was popularized in America, in 1822, by Dr. Clement Clark Moore, a professor in the General Theological Seminary in New York, who wrote the well known poem, “The Night Before Christmas.” He, by means of this poem, added the sleigh and reindeer (from which the more recent “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” is derived) to the Santa Claus myth. It was also through the instrumentality of this professor (?) that Santa Claus is said to deliver the gifts on December 25 instead of December 6. Thus the very customs, observed at Christmas time, cast a surprizing light on the efforts of Satan and his emissaries (including especially the false church throughout the ages) to materialize, carnalize, degrade, and annul the celebration of the Birth of Christ. And let us, as Protestant Reformed Young People, not be swept away by the ever-increasing tide of pagan Christmas traditions; but rather go in faith to Bethlehem, as did the shepherds of old, “to see that wonder which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

Seymour Beiboer

A Perplexity to the Worldly: Jerusalem was filled with interpreters of the Law: Scribes, Lawyers, Priests, Pharisees. Wise in words, yet hard in heart, they came not to the manger crib. Worldly-wise and unbelieving as they were, they failed to perceive how Christ could be the joy and hope of the human heart.

DAY-STAR FROM ON HIGH

The Theme of the Angels’ Song: Sing they must, for He was Christ the Lord—their Lord from before creation. He was to be the Saviour; to lift fallen man and to remove the curse from creation.

The Joy of the Humble: The shepherds of Judea were unknown and insignificant; but the Lord thought on them, giving them the first word of the Saviour’s birth. This is still the joy of the humble: That God should so think on us as to give His Son.

A Terror to the Sinful: Herod feared this Child that stood in the way of his sin; and in his terror he raced deeper into sin. Christ, the Holy One—God’s own power against sin, always brings fear to those who love their sin.

“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

“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Isaiah 53:2
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