

# BEACON LIGHTS

## Celebrating the Promised Messiah

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## THE ISSUE AT HAND

The month of December ushers in a season of the year that is precious to the believer because of its association with the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Though our celebration of Christmas during this month of the year is more representative of Christian tradition than a real knowledge of exactly when the Christ-child was born, it nonetheless draws our attention to the preeminent miracle of all history—the Incarnation.

The immensity of what happened in a lowly stable in Bethlehem on Christmas day cannot be adequately expressed in words. God himself came to earth in human form to fulfill his covenant vow to send a “seed” that would destroy the curse of sin and rescue his people from bondage. But he came in a form that no one recognized, doing this to subvert any thought that humanity would be saved by its own power, wealth, or prestige. The indescribable paradox (look this word up!) that this represents is the greatest mystery the world will ever know.

Though human words may fail us, the “breath” of God provided to us in Scripture tells us exactly who was in the manger on Christmas morning. Here is how God describes his “dear Son”:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:15–18).

As the creation around us becomes dormant and appears to die under the ice and snow of winter, we

remember the birth of our Messiah, who is the focal point of all history. The seed of life implanted in the virgin Mary “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As we ponder the blessed mystery of the Incarnation this month, let us see the grace of God revealed in his Son and worship him, that he might have the preeminence!

The feature articles for this month will focus our worship on the promised Messiah, who is honored in word and in song by believers of all ages. The first of these articles, written several years ago for *Beacon Lights* by Prof. Herman Hanko, will remind us of the reason that we continue to celebrate the Christmas holiday despite its corruption by the world. This article is followed by a reflection on the gift of speech shown to us in the words of Zacharias, who celebrated his Lord more than the son he had been miraculously granted in his old age. The third of our feature articles leads readers to ponder the value of spiritual music as a means of praising God with its commendation of the majestic seasonal piece *Messiah*, composed by G. F. Handel. Lest we forget the dangers of this season with its often-trite view of the manger, we are reminded in our concluding feature article that the Lord of glory who came in the flesh will always be ignored and rejected by those who have not received the gift of faith and have no room for Jesus.

As we close out this calendar year, we give thanks to God for making publication of *Beacon Lights* possible. We ask readers for their prayers and continued support as we look forward to a new year (and a new look) for *Beacon Lights*. May God continue to be praised through this magazine and its contents in the coming year!

# WE WILL HAVE A KING OVER US

The desire for strong leadership has been a natural tendency for people throughout human history. The evidence of this is abundant in Scripture, which gives us the names of men like Lamech and Nimrod, who stood out as mighty men of renown in their day. Lamech was a proud murderer who raised three sons who led the world with their ingenuity. Nimrod was a mighty hunter who led the people of Mesopotamia to gather at Babel, seeking to build a glorious civilization that would allow them to ascend to God in heaven. Both were examples of the strong man that the world loves to follow and, if we are honest, loves to worship.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that the fallen people who make up God's church throughout history have often slipped into a similar pattern of thinking. Consider, for example, the Old Testament people of Israel during the days of Samuel. Sick and tired of the endless cycle of warfare that brought constant insecurity to their land, they came to Samuel and demanded that he find them a strong man who could rule them.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles (1 Sam. 8:19–20).

From one point of view, we can sympathize with the Israelites. What they appeared to want was simply the fulfillment of God's promise to grant them the land of Canaan through victory over the wicked people surrounding them. Years of pressure from the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and other heathen nations had made them weary. They were disunited, vulnerable, and fractured into regional tribes with only an occasional judge to lead them. What they needed was a strong leader—someone

like Moses or Joshua—who could truly unite the whole nation and bring security to its borders. What they wanted was a king.

In and of itself this desire was not entirely wrong, because God had indeed promised that the seed of Abraham would someday produce the promised Messiah. This Messiah would be a royal leader, someone even greater than Melchizedek who could intercede for his people as a priest and lead them into battle as a king. The spiritual remnant in Israel always looked for this Messiah, expecting that God would fulfill his promises to their forefathers and raise up a man who would lead them to peace with God for eternity.

The problem, of course, was that the desire for a king that most Israelites expressed was corrupted by their underlying motivation, which was betrayed by their words “that we also may be like all the nations.” This desire was not really for the promised Messiah, but for an earthly king who would provide physical security in the violent and dangerous land of Canaan. The Israelites wanted someone who could settle disputes and enforce the laws of the land. Someone who would fight the nation's battles for her, keeping her borders safe from threats. Someone who could project the power, wealth, and glory of Israel for other nations to admire and fear. That was the kind of king Israel wanted. An earthly ruler, just like the other nations.

The story of Old Testament Israel isn't an isolated incident. Around one thousand years later, the Jewish people were just as confused about the Messiah as were their forefathers during Samuel's days. What they expected (and truly wanted) was a Messiah who would overthrow the political power of Rome and lead the Jewish nation to independence. Very few of them were looking for a spiritual Messiah who would deliver them from their sins. Even fewer looked for a poor, meek, suffering servant who

would carry out a brief and controversial ministry before dying as an outcast on a Roman cross. It simply was beyond their comprehension that this was the true Messiah that God had promised. Jesus simply didn't fit.

The inability of fallen humans to imagine a king like our Lord Jesus Christ will always be true apart from the gift of faith. To the natural man, God's wisdom in saving his people through the means of a meek and humble servant who gave his life for his friends will always seem like utter folly (1 Cor. 1:22–29). In truth, our Lord was the antithesis of what the world looks for in its leaders. Even in his powerful miracles he always pointed away from the physical event to a deeper spiritual reality (John 6). When most of his followers figured this out, they quit following him. The world isn't interested in the humble Christ of Scripture. They want a strong man. Someone who can be an earthly king.

Before we get too fixated on criticizing the world around us, however, we would do well to ask whether we wrongly fall into this same mindset in the church today. Even followers of Christ have a natural tendency to look to strong leaders as the solution to their problems in the church or in their personal lives. We all like someone to lean on during difficult times, and most often the type of person we gravitate toward is one who is a bold and confident leader. Most of us would take a David over a Mephibosheth given the choice.

To be clear, strong leaders are not necessarily a bad thing. We may rightly be thankful for men who have been put in a position of church leadership by God's providence and have carried out their role with faith and conviction. Their courage to stand for the truth of God's word during times of spiritual trouble is a gift to the church of Jesus Christ. We may admire their abilities in writing and speaking or their wisdom in leadership so long as we never lose sight of the source of these gifts. Strong leaders in the church can be a good thing.

But alongside the gift of strong leadership comes the temptation for us to make more of our leaders—past and present—than is biblically proper. In our admiration for their abilities, we can begin to see them as infallible or inspired. When this happens, we often become over-reliant on their opinions about matters of doctrine or practice in the church. Maybe some readers have experienced this during a church Bible study or an informal group discussion of Scripture. Over the course of the discussion, someone refers to a commentary or a sermon by a

prominent church leader that offers an interpretation of the text at hand. As soon as the name of the leader is referenced, discussion comes to a screeching halt. Who wants to offer an opposing point of view when it means questioning the perspective of *that* man? Shouldn't we just take his word on the matter and end discussion?

When this sort of experience becomes the common feature of our Bible studies, it might indicate we have a problem. Of course, we ought to respect and honor the viewpoints of faithful leaders in the church, but we ought not elevate their opinions to the same level as Scripture. Doing so suggests that our leaders have become objects of trust in place of the Lord they represent. Even worse, they can become objects of our *worship*, which is a huge danger to the people of God. Scripture offers a firm warning about this error from the apostle John's encounter with an angel in his vision.

And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Rev. 22:8–9).

Like the Old Testament Israelites, it's entirely possible that we desire the good gift of strong leadership for the wrong reasons. We need to ask ourselves why we want this type of leader. Is it perhaps because we lack confidence in the word of God as an infallible guide? Or is it maybe because we are too lazy to invest the time required to understand the doctrines of grace taught by God's word? Do we want a leader to "go out before us, and fight our battles" for us because we are too timid or busy with other distractions to fight sin and error ourselves? If any of these motivations describe us, we need to repent and seek the Lord Jesus Christ as the one true object of our faith and hope.

Let me close with one last thought for young people who are starting to become more active in church life as confessing members. When you have a vote in selecting elders and deacons or calling a pastor, look for the most important qualifications in a leader first. Your reference point here should be Jesus Christ himself. He was indeed a strong leader, but he came to us in the form of a humble servant rather than a conquering king (Phil. 2:5–8). Look for that sort of leader and trust that the weakness of God is stronger than the wisdom of men.

## OF WHAT VALUE IS CHRISTMAS?

*This article originally appeared in the December 2010 edition (vol. 69, no. 11) of Beacon Lights as a part of the Christian Living rubric. We welcome the reminder of why we commemorate this season of the year as a religious holiday.*

It is true that in this age of commercialism, when the church itself conies<sup>1</sup> under the influence of the world in its celebration of Christmas, we are very easily led away from the true spiritual significance of Christmas as a Christian holiday. It is often true that with the glitter of gifts and tinsel the greatest miracle of all times is obscured to us. It is true often-times that the excitement of merry-making obliterates from us the wonder of grace: God became flesh. It is true that we are so concerned about presents and eating that the mystery of Bethlehem is lost sight of.

If that is the case, then there is no reason why we should celebrate Christmas at all, at least as a Christian holiday. The question is, Why Christmas in the church? The world answers: to make money; to have fun; to exchange gifts. Last November 6 there was a Santa Claus parade in downtown Grand Rapids to usher in the Yuletide season. One just barely recuperates, financially, from the past Christmas and the next season is on its way.

Why Christmas in the church? Why does the church have a Christian holiday called Christmas? And do not say that you have heard often that Christmas is so abused that you have no need of it. Maybe that is true. But it is a danger.

Why do we, as church, set one day aside for Christmas?

Let's answer that question.

Certainly, the church did not set this day aside in order that we might have this day of the year to shout "Merry Christmas" to each other and shower our friends with gifts even though the Magi brought to the Christ gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold. If that is all Christmas means to us, then we might just as well strike the holiday out of our Christian calendars.

You may say that it is the day that we commemorate

the birth of Christ. And in itself that is true enough. But Christmas is not the only time that we talk of the Incarnation. We speak of it the year around, for it is of central importance in our life in the midst of this world.

You may answer that this is the day on which 1,956 years ago Christ was born, and therefore we commemorate his birthday. That is not true, for the exact date of the year is not even known.

Why, then, do we have Christmas as a Christian holiday?

The answer is that once a year the church comes together to commemorate in a special way the great miracle of God: that he sent his Son into the likeness of sinful flesh.

The story itself is very simple. Luke tells us that Christmas story—"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." That is really all there is to it. There is more about what happened before Christmas, and what happened after Christmas, but that is the Christmas story. There is nothing so complicated or so strange about that. A child can understand that story. "And she brought forth her firstborn son..." But at the same time, all the theologians in all the ages of the church, and all the students of Holy Writ from the beginning of time, have never been able to fathom the depths of that simple story. A child can understand it, oh yes, but the wisest in the church of God cannot comprehend it. For it is the wonder of God, the miracle of miracles, the center of the Christian's faith.

And on Christmas we go as the church of Christ with the wise men, with the shepherds, to that humble manger outside of Bethlehem, to pause for a moment at the side of the Christ child.

And on this coming December 25th when we are brought there again, what is your reaction? Do you turn away in disbelief, more interested in the things of this world? Do you pity the poor child who came into the world in such abject poverty? That is the same as unbelief. Look at the shepherds. There is no pity in their eyes. Do you try "to make room in your heart" for this child who could find no room in the

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1 In case this is an unfamiliar word, have a look at Proverbs 30:26 in the KJV for another reference to the creature Prof. Hanko speaks of here.

inn? No, we pause with the shepherds and the wise men and worship. For we have before our eyes the wonder of God.

And what thoughts go through your mind as you stand there?

As you gaze on that babe this thought enters your mind: this is the eternal Son of God who is coequal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, who is highly transcendent above all that is of this world and everything in it. This babe is the most blessed one, the only holy one. But he is Immanuel—God with us. God in our flesh come by way of the womb of the virgin Mary, to be like us in all things, sin excepted. And then you can only marvel at this great wonder.

Or you can see in this child who is in the manger before you a human nature like ours perfectly united with the divine nature in the person of the Son of God. And again, you marvel. How is that possible? It is a wonder of God.

And certainly, to learn of these things you go to Bethlehem on Christmas.

But there is more that is important to you. This thought also passes through your mind. This child is called Jesus—Jehovah Salvation. And then you see that in that child is the most amazing of all wonders, that he is the gift of the love of God whereby he came into your and my flesh in order to take upon

himself that flesh and blood, and in order to suffer for our guilt that we might be free from our sin.

And that is important, isn't it? You are concerned about your sin, aren't you? And you have come to the conclusion that there is no escape in yourself from the dungeon of your iniquity. Therefore, as you stand beside this manger, let this thought enter your soul also, that here is God's manifestation of the salvation he has prepared for you.

And then as you leave that manger on December 25, the blessedness of that experience lingers with you as you pursue the way to the hill called Calvary, and to the garden of Joseph, until many Christmases later, you shall again see Christ return to take you to himself in glory. We will not find that truth anywhere else in all this world. We will not find that truth if the world dictates our celebration of Christmas. But if God in his grace leads us this coming Christmas to his manger and instructs us by his Spirit in these truths, then we are blessed indeed. Then we have a reason for commemorating Christmas as a Christian holiday. Then we see that Christmas is for the church of Christ the most blessed of any day in the year.

*Prof. Hanks is the emeritus professor of Church History & New Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological School, where he served the denomination from 1965 to 2001.*

Ellie Regnerus

## THE GIFT OF THE TONGUE

*This article is based on the song of Zacharias, which is found in Luke 1:67–79.*

It is estimated that the average person speaks about seven thousand words in a single day.<sup>1</sup> Now imagine not being able to speak at all for a whole nine months. This would equal out to well over a million words that one would not be able to speak in that time frame! This was what Zacharias had to endure while his wife was pregnant with their son, John the Baptist. He could not comfort his aged pregnant

wife with words. He could not talk to her about the glory of being able to speak with the angel Gabriel while he was in the temple. He had to watch all of this while having his tongue tied because he did not have the strength of faith to believe in God's promise of a son to him in his old age.

What a fantastic event for Zacharias when he was able to see his son and write that the baby's name must be John! His tongue was immediately loosed, and one of the first things he did was to glorify God through a song. Instead of cursing God for making his tongue tied, he immediately blessed the Lord God of Israel. This in and of itself can serve as a fine example to us. Let us watch our tongues as closely as Zacharias did. He praised God for giving his people the promise of salvation from their sins.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Petrone, "You Speak (at Least) 7,000 Words a Day. Here's How to Make Them Count," *LinkedIn Learning Blog*, 17 Aug. 2017, [www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/career-success-tips/you-speak-at-least-7-000-words-a-day-here-s-how-to-make-them](http://www.linkedin.com/business/learning/blog/career-success-tips/you-speak-at-least-7-000-words-a-day-here-s-how-to-make-them).

He acclaimed the greatness of God for providing the “horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” that we might be able to serve him with no fear of the enemy.

The song of Zacharias found at the end of Luke 1 relates to Christ’s birth, which we will be celebrating this month. Zacharias spoke of the oath of salvation that God made with his servant Abraham. The people of God were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Savior associated with this promise. They had waited over four thousand years for this promise of God to be fulfilled. They had first heard it made to Adam, then to Abraham, and then to all Israel by the Old Testament prophets. Over and over again, these servants of the Lord had proclaimed the promise of the coming of Messiah. The joy of the people must have been unimaginable as they learned from the forerunner, John the Baptist, that the long-awaited Christ was coming!

The joy of Christ to the people in that day is a joy that we celebrate today as well. Imagine your life without Jesus. No hope of salvation. No real joy. No real love. We need to speak of the many blessings of Jesus coming down to this earth through his work of salvation. We must not be tongue-tied like Zacharias was. Zacharias says in Luke 1:74, “That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.” No matter how daunting coworkers may seem, no matter how much peer pressure may scare us, let us never be quiet about the work of Christ while on this earth. Jesus is the greatest gift that we can ever receive. No matter how fantastic that new iPhone, Samsung, or other technology may seem to be, Jesus is the greatest gift.

Zacharias also spoke of the “tender mercy of our God,” which can be seen in no greater way than

when he sent his only begotten Son into this world filled with sin. Jesus is the light of the world. This is such an encouragement to us as we live in the end times when the world is continuing to fill its dark cup of iniquity. We have the Savior, the one who can lead us through all the troubles of our time. The one who loves us endlessly. Let us thank God for that lovely gift of salvation as we celebrate Christ entering the world!

Undoubtedly Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost while he sang. This is evident because Zacharias spoke mostly of the wonders of the promised Messiah rather than the wonders of his own son, who had just been born as a miracle to him and Elisabeth in their old age. This, too, can serve as a lesson for us. We can be very tempted to focus on ourselves during this time of year as we anticipate the giving and receiving of gifts. At the end of his song, Zacharias does speak of how God would use his son John to announce the arrival of Christ. John the Baptist had a great task of giving the people the knowledge of Christ and the salvation that he would bring to his people. Like his father, John constantly turned the people toward Christ. May we also do this as we speak to others around us.

The song of Zacharias may not be very well known to all of us, but oh how delightful it is! From not being able to speak, to singing of the marvelous works that Christ would do while on the earth, Zacharias set a great example for us all. Give all the glory to God and his Son Jesus Christ during this season of the year!

*Ellie is a graduate of Trinity Christian High and now works in the farm equipment retail business. She is a member of Doon Protestant Reformed Church.*

Jake Dykstra

## REFLECTIONS ON G. F. HANDEL’S MESSIAH

*Messiah*: this age-old masterpiece was composed in 1741 in London, England. A brilliant musician and composer, George Frederic Handel completed his three-part oratorio in a mere twenty-four days. With words carefully selected from the entirety of the King James Version by English lyricist Charles Jennens, the story of our Savior was set to music. While many of us may not be familiar with this genre

of music, anyone can understand what musical brilliance it would take to write two hours and twenty minutes of lyrical music, complete with scores for an entire orchestra, choir, and four soloists. Such ability is especially remarkable to those of us who can barely find middle C on a piano.

I grew up listening to *Messiah*; it was nearly always played in our house in the days and weeks

surrounding Christmastime. As a young child, I thought my parents were trying to punish me with what my siblings and I referred to as the “Horrid Singers.” Apparently, we were unimpressed by our first introduction to vibrato. But as I have matured, the beauty of the music and words have had a profound impact on me, and even served to strengthen my faith. Similar to our beloved Psalms that we sing in church each Sunday, this piece is composed almost entirely of Christ’s own words in Scripture. This is one thing that my wife and I have benefited from greatly. We often hear a Bible verse and instantly recognize it and are usually even able to recite it because we know it from *Messiah*.

For some reason, music enables us to retain words that we normally would not take the time to memorize intentionally. I would feel confident saying that of the eighty-one verses used in Handel’s *Messiah*, I have nearly all of them memorized. This isn’t meant to show that I’m so great at memorizing; rather, it shows the power of words put to music. This is an important thing for us to remember. Music penetrates our minds, and eventually, our hearts. Believe me, words seared into your head by the hot iron of worldly music remain longer than you would think. I shudder to think of some of the things that I used to listen to, and I hope that you can learn from my mistakes. Take in music that is scriptural, edifying, and God-glorifying. Challenge yourself to be different than your peers. You don’t need the latest rap or pop song with a thumping bassline. It’s okay to listen to “uncool” music with a violin and a harpsichord. Learn to listen to music with discernment for its beauty and God-glorifying characteristics, not its beat. You will find that the positive impact it has on your life is far greater than any negative impact you may experience from the criticism of others.

Good music like Handel’s *Messiah* has helped me to better understand and believe the infallibility and complete nature of Scripture. Most of the verses used to tell the story of Christ are drawn from the Old Testament. You may ask, why is that so great? Well, let it sink in for a moment. The story of Christ, told from the Old Testament! He wasn’t even born yet! But by a wonder work of God, prophets were moved to speak of the coming Savior in striking detail. Take Isaiah 7:14, an alto solo in Part 1: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Listen to the mezzo-soprano solo in Part 2 based on Isaiah 50:6: “He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off his hair: He hid not his face from

shame and spitting.” These are just two examples, and are they not very literally what we find happening in the New Testament? See Matthew 1:23 and 26:67. Listen to the soprano solo in Part 3 based on Job 19:25–26 and 1 Corinthians 15:20 and notice the connection between these passages concerning Christ’s resurrection. Job, thousands of years before Christ, was so certain of his Redeemer’s victory over death that it carried him through an experience of crushing difficulty. We ought to be impressed by the way that Scripture confirms itself as absolutely true through prophecy and fulfillment.

We know that as well as being entirely trustworthy, God’s word brims with comfort and encouragement for his people in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the main character of *Messiah*. The comforting nature of Scripture is made uniquely impactful to us when set to music. If you listen carefully, you may notice how closely the melodies composed by Handel relate to the words that they carry with them. I trust that you will find the soprano solo based on Isaiah 40:11 and Matthew 11:28–29 to be one such melody. What a balm to the weary soul to hear of our Savior who is “meek and lowly of heart” and will “gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Awed sorrow grips us when we hear from Psalm 69:20, “He looked for some to have pity on him, but there was none; neither found he any to comfort him.” Excitement fills our hearts when we hear that the Word is decreed to be shared with others in Psalm 68:11 and Romans 10:18: “The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of the preachers,” and “Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.”

The conclusion of *Messiah* leaves us with no doubt as to Christ’s victory over sin and death for us. Take in the soprano/tenor duet from 1 Corinthians 15:55, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Then, in glorious praise, we sing in our hearts with a full chorus, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. AMEN!” (Rev. 5:12–14). While certainly applicable for Christmas, *Messiah* is full of the story of our Savior’s life from birth to death, and even looks forward to that day when all his saints will praise him for eternity.

So, perhaps you can use this Christmas season to start a new trend in the music you listen to. Maybe

changing to a genre from the 1700s seems like a pretty extreme way to start, but I would argue that some good old-fashioned music might be exactly what you need. I highly recommend finding a local performance of *Messiah* and attending with your friends. It will not disappoint! But if the music style is just too much for you to overcome, you can easily use the verses contained in Handel's *Messiah* as a

study of Christ's life in your personal devotions this Christmastime. You will find that the Scripture contained there is applicable for every season of life, not just Christmas or Easter.

*Jake is a member of the Beacon Lights staff and has served the magazine in multiple positions, including his current role as business manager. He attends Unity Protestant Reformed Church with his family.*

Jeremy Van Baren

## NO ROOM FOR THE SAVIOR

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). We often hear this verse around Christmastime, but how often do we consider what it means that there was no room in the inn? Of course, the physical inn in Bethlehem was full, but beyond that, Jesus was brought into a world that had no room for him. The rejection of Jesus by the world and the false church can be seen by the events surrounding his birth and serves as a vital lesson to us today.

The first rejection of Jesus was by the world. When Herod heard about the birth of Jesus, he “[sought] the young child to destroy him” (Matt. 2:13). Herod had no interest in worshiping Jesus as he had told the wise men; he only had interest in himself. In response to being told that the King of the Jews was born in Bethlehem, Herod wanted to protect his own claim as the leader over the region of Judea. The world does not want any part of the saving grace of God. That would require humility and sacrifice. Instead, the world rejects God to further their own desires.

Herod's rejection also shows how little the world cares for Jesus. While he wanted no part of the Savior and desired to destroy him, Herod did not want to take the time to do it himself. Instead, he sent the wise men to report on where to find the child. Herod wanted to protect his own position, but he did not view Jesus as an imminent or important threat. He would let other people deal with his problem. We can also see this in the world today. In America, we are not under active persecution in the sense that the world is attacking the church openly and thereby actively rejecting Jesus by persecuting

his body, the church. Instead, we see a more passive rejection in that the people of this world do what they want with little interest in Christianity. Like Herod, they don't like what they hear, but it does not seem to have direct implications for their lives. They can deal with it later.

There will come a time, however, when the world actively rejects Jesus. When Herod saw that the wise men did not tell him where Jesus was located, he commanded all the children two years and under to be killed (Matt. 2:16). He went from passively rejecting Jesus to actively seeking his destruction at all costs. Similarly, we can expect that one day the world will begin to actively persecute the church in their broader rejection of Christ.

While it is important to see the rejection of Jesus by the world, it is also important to recognize that he was rejected not only by the world but also by the visible church. Jesus was not born in Athens or Rome. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. At the heart of it, there was no room for him in the church. And unlike Herod's initial reaction, this would have been an active rejection. I find it unlikely that Joseph would have talked to only one or two people to find a place to stay. He likely went to as many people as possible to find a place other than the stables for his wife to deliver a child. The people of Bethlehem would have had to individually say that there was no room for Jesus with them. The only people who had any interest were a few lowly shepherds near the town (Luke 2:15). All others had ignored Jesus.

This rejection by the church is underscored by the fact that they ought to have been watching for the coming of Jesus. They had forgotten the prophecies of a Savior who would be born in Bethlehem (Mic.

5:2). They no longer cared about the line of David from which Jesus would descend (Isa. 11:1). Israel was more interested in the issues of their time than in the word of God that was prophesied to them. We can see this in our time as well where churches are disregarding parts of God's word by accepting sinful ideologies. As in the church at the time of Jesus, the word is forgotten or, in some cases, completely ignored as an outdated and bigoted message. The failure to listen to the word of God represents a rejection of Jesus.

It is easy to criticize others for their sinful actions, but how does the story of Jesus' rejection apply to us today? First, we must recognize that by nature we are no better than Herod who sought to destroy him. We would only care about ourselves and our status in this world without God's grace. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul lists a variety of sins and ends with "and such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 11). We cannot view ourselves as better than those around us because by nature we are no better.

Similarly, we must learn from Israel's rejection of Jesus. There is no excuse for us to forget God's word. We must study it regularly and actively seek to understand it. This is especially important considering that Jesus is coming again. We are called to "not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). The church visible at Jesus' birth was not anticipating his coming; we must not make the same mistake by failing to vigilantly study the word of God.

In summary, we can see that Jesus was rejected by all: both by the world and by the church. We can learn from this by seeing that total depravity means we are no better than the world without Christ and that it is easy to become like the church of his time by not being mindful of his imminent return. Praise God that he has chosen to save us through Jesus who was rejected!

*Jeremy is a recent graduate of Calvin University and now works as an electrical engineer at Flexco in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church.*

## Current Events Scott Van Uffelen

### THE ONE-TRILLION-DOLLAR COIN

When I was a boy, I once (or twice!) played the game "Three Wishes" with my friends. The premise of the game was that any three wishes you had would come true exactly as you stated them. The limiting rules were that you could not hurt or kill anyone, you could not wish to live forever, and you could not wish for more wishes. Invariably, the one common wish was the wish to be rich or, more specifically, for unlimited money. Although short and simple, the game was a great way to pass time, to get lost in momentary daydreaming, and to learn how your friends thought. I wish I could say that we stayed wholesome and pure in our reasons for wanting to be rich, but that wasn't really the case. Money seemingly was the answer for everything in our lives, for money would give us whatever we wanted with little to no consequences or thought.

I suppose we were not the only ones to have played this game because our government seems to be filled with officials who are living out its fantasy in real life. Let me briefly explain what I mean. Each year Congress consistently spends more money than

it has collected in taxes. To accomplish this magical feat, it borrows money to make up the difference and to avoid a government shutdown. Unfortunately, this has become such a common scenario that it has become necessary to put a limit on what can be borrowed to fund overspending each year. We call this the "debt limit" or "debt ceiling." Already in early October, our country was nearing this debt ceiling after having overspent our collected revenue and borrowed money once again. This forced Congress members to acknowledge that a government shutdown might be a possibility. Rather than make the hard decision to hold themselves accountable, however, Congress began daydreaming. A "trillion-dollar coin" entered its imagination.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of minting a single, trillion-dollar coin is not new, as a similar idea was already proposed back in 2011 and again in 2018. Although

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Salmon, "Trillion-dollar platinum coin could be minted at the last minute," *Axios*, October 5, 2021.

never acted upon, the basic concept is that the president could order the treasury secretary to mint a one-trillion-dollar coin out of platinum, then immediately deposit it in the national bank we call the Federal Reserve. This deposit would make the debt ceiling disappear and provide space for the government to keep spending. Perhaps surprisingly, this strategy to avoid a government shutdown has many proponents who see the debt ceiling as an unnecessary hindrance. In very little time, they claim, the treasury secretary could order the design, minting, and deposit of such a coin to make our nation's debt "disappear." Sounds like unlimited money for spending to me!

As preposterous as this scenario sounds, the reason for the theoretical daydreaming is equally troubling. Our government is at an impasse when it comes to spending. During every election cycle, candidates make promises they know they cannot keep from a financial perspective. But given the political polarization in our country, few candidates really expect to have the votes required to pass the spending bills needed to keep those promises. All that a candidate has to do is make promises to his or her constituency and, if elected, blame the other party for blocking efforts to fulfill them. It's a simple calculus with terrible financial implications.

The simple (and rather obvious) solution is for politicians to show restraint and spend only the money that can be raised, which is primarily through taxes. This is hard, though, when one's political opponents seem willing to spend anything to get votes. Promises of stimulus checks, military expansion, free college education, and complimentary healthcare have made both parties wary of showing financial restraint when the opposing party clearly will not.<sup>2</sup> It is a never-ending game of political one-upmanship to capture votes that continues to push national debt to record levels.

The latest evidence that unrestrained spending will continue is playing out as our government considers bills that would authorize the expenditure of trillions of dollars on national infrastructure and social programs.<sup>3</sup> Estimates of the cost of these

bills run upward of 4.7 trillion dollars! Let those numbers sink in. For reference, our government collected \$3.42 trillion in 2020, roughly \$10,400 per person.<sup>4</sup> This means that the *increase* in spending *above* current levels—which are already in the trillions—would be almost \$4,000 per person greater than all tax revenue collected. Unless taxes are raised considerably, passing such bills would prove that Congress has no intent of spending only what it raises and even less intent of staying within the approved borrowing debt limit. Voting for such bills means Congress starts with the assumption that it has unlimited money to spend, money that does not even yet exist. In retrospect, maybe the trillion-dollar coin theory is not so preposterous after all!

As young people living in these free-spending times, we need to be wary of learning how to steward our resources by observing the habits of our government—and really our entire country. While common sense and the patterns of creation itself (Prov. 6:6) warn us of the folly of spending beyond our means, we also have the witness of Scripture to guide us in a principled use of the material and financial gifts that have been bestowed upon us by God. Among these principles are the commands to labor diligently (Prov. 10:4–5; 2 Thess. 3:6–12) and to be wary of debt (Ps. 37:21; Prov. 22:7). Read and study God's word on financial stewardship and look to godly examples in the church to learn how to be grounded biblically in your use of the resources God has provided.

Understanding the financial times that we are experiencing is paramount. We need to pray that God will give us wisdom in the earning, spending, and investing of money for the greatest priorities of his kingdom. These priorities include the proper care of the church and its ministers, the spread of the gospel through mission fields, the support of good Christian schools, and the care of the poor and needy in our churches and communities. May God grant us the ability and humility to support the needs of his kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) in love for him and our neighbor, rather than living out a financial daydream of never-ending material prosperity in this world.

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2 Paul Krugman, "Biden Should Ignore the Debt Limit and Mint a \$1 Trillion Coin," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2021.

3 Jarrett Renshaw and Andrea Shalal, "Biden, Democrats aim for deal on spending package in coming days," *Reuters*, October 19, 2021.

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4 Erin Duffin, "U.S. government revenues in the fiscal year of 2020, by category," *Statista*, August 3, 2021.

## THE DAILY PRESS

“press toward the mark...”  
(Philippians 3:14)

# The Gospel of Luke (2): An Offensive Savior

The great Messiah whom God had promised to his people had finally arrived! But he was not at all the type of savior that most people were expecting. Where were the great displays of power and majesty that one would expect from the King of kings? Where was the mighty warrior who was going to overthrow the Roman government? This man actually submitted to the government instead of rebelling against it. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were waiting for a savior who would tell them that they were doing a good job following all the rules, reinforce their authority, and establish a glorious earthly kingdom for the Jewish people. What they got instead was a simple carpenter from Nazareth who paid attention to women and publicans and healed both important centurions’ servants and poor widows’ sons. He was more concerned with showing compassion to people than conquering them. And to top it all off, he told the Pharisees that all the Old Testament rules that they loved so much were now obsolete. The Jewish people were perplexed, the religious leaders were outraged, and even John the Baptist expressed doubt about whether Jesus is really the Christ. He did not fit expectations.

Above all else, Jesus preached God’s truth to the people with authority and wisdom. He healed incurable diseases, delivered many from demon possession, and raised people from the dead. But although he possessed all the power in the world and beyond, his life on earth was still characterized by lowliness. As he pointed out to John the Baptist’s messengers, his work was being accomplished through humble, faithful daily labor. He was meek and loving both to those who followed him and to those who opposed him. His tender love for the sinners whom he came to save was evident while he was on this earth. He also taught the people that they must reflect this tender love to others. When you read through Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6 this month, notice all the commands he gives to love, give, pray for, be merciful to, judge not, condemn not, and forgive others. Jesus’

works testified to who he was just as our works also testify to who we are in Christ. Jesus taught in Luke 6:44, “For every tree is known by his own fruit.” What fruit is evident in your life? Can your friends, classmates, and coworkers see that you have a living faith by your humble, faithful daily labor?

As the news about Jesus’ teaching in the synagogues and his great miracles was spread throughout the area, it resulted in both positive and negative attention from the crowds of people that gathered to watch and listen. Some people believed in and followed him, while others—most notably the religious leaders—hated his message. Because they had wrong expectations concerning Jesus, they were offended by his actions and the content of his teachings. They had expected a great place for themselves in an earthly kingdom. Their pride caused them to stumble over his claim to be the only way of salvation and his demand for complete service. Most of the Jews rejected Jesus and ultimately crucified him, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus would be “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3).

The truth about Jesus is still a stumbling block to many people when it is preached today. Just as Jesus was not appealing to men when he was on this earth, the message of the gospel is unattractive and even offensive to those who do not have God-given faith. Most people do not want to hear that Jesus is the only way of salvation. They want to serve whatever god they think is best, whether it be Allah, Buddha, or the god of self. And they want to live life their own way instead of God’s way. Do you ever struggle with this temptation? The Christian life is a difficult path from an earthly perspective. There is no room in the life of a Christian for pride and selfish goals. In Jesus’ own words, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). But as he goes on to point out in verse 25, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?

Jesus gives a beautiful beatitude in Luke 7:23:

“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” The life of a Christian may be difficult, but it is a blessed life. One can only experience this blessedness by being united to Christ by faith. By faith, our hope is in our Savior—not the one that we want him to be, but the true Savior that is set forth in Scripture. Only this Savior has the power to

save those who are dead in sin just as he brought the dead back to life when he was on this earth. By faith, our sufficiency is not in what we can gain on this earth, but in what Christ has accomplished for us. By faith, we trust that someday soon he will come back again so we are able to take our place in his glorious, eternal kingdom forever!

Date	Read	Study Question	Sing or Pray
December 8	Luke 4:14–19; Isaiah 61:1–3	What is Jesus teaching us about the nature of his ministry when he quotes from Isaiah 61?	Psalter #2
December 9	Luke 4:20–30	What was Jesus showing the people with his examples from the Old Testament? Why did this make them so angry?	Psalter #4
December 10	Luke 4:31–44	What further proof do we find in this passage that Jesus is the Son of God?	Psalter #5
December 11	Luke 5:1–11	What were these men losing by following Jesus? What were they gaining? How about you?	Psalter #6
December 12	Luke 5:12–26	What did Jesus do to restore himself in the busyness of his ministry? How often do you do this?	Psalter #10
December 13	Luke 5:27–32	What do we learn about Jesus and the purpose of his work from what he says to the scribes and Pharisees?	Psalter #12
December 14	Luke 5:33–39	What does Jesus’ parable about old and new teach us about the Old and New Testaments?	Psalter #13
December 15	Luke 6:1–11	How were the Pharisees abusing God’s good gift of Sabbath? What does Jesus teach us about the proper use of the Sabbath by his words and actions?	Psalter #14
December 16	Luke 6:12–16	Look up the meaning of the word “apostle.” What does it tell you about the calling of these twelve men?	Psalter #16
December 17	Luke 6:17–26	What are the differences between the blessing of God’s kingdom that Jesus describes and what people are usually referring to when they say they are “blessed”?	Psalter #18
December 18	Luke 6:27–42	What is real love according to Jesus’ teaching in these verses?	Psalter #20
December 19	Luke 6:43–49	What do these two parables teach us about the importance of our actions?	Psalter #21
December 20	Luke 7:1–10	What does the healing of the centurion’s servant teach us about true faith?	Psalter #22
December 21	Luke 7:11–17; 1 Kings 17:17–24	How was Elijah a picture of Jesus? How is Jesus greater than Elijah?	Psalter #23
December 22	Luke 7:18–23	What was Jesus trying to teach John with his answer to John’s doubtful questions?	Psalter #25
December 23	Luke 7:24–28	How are believers today even more privileged than John the Baptist and others who lived during Jesus’ earthly ministry?	Psalter #28
December 24	Luke 7:29–35	What was Jesus trying to point out about the religious leaders who did not believe by comparing them to quarreling children?	Psalter #33
December 25	Luke 7:36–50	Notice the contrast between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Why was one forgiven and not the other?	Psalter #36
December 26	Luke 8:1–3	Can you list three things that these verses teach us about Jesus and his earthly ministry?	Psalter #41
December 27	Luke 8:4–21	Why did Jesus speak in parables according to verses 9–10?	Psalter #43
December 28	Luke 8:22–25	How does learning and understanding more about God strengthen our faith in him?	Psalter #46

December 29	Luke 8:26–39	After being delivered from demon possession by Jesus, how does this man’s life change? How did your life change when you were freed from the bondage of sin?	Psalter #50
December 30	Luke 8:40–56	What are the similarities and differences between the healings of Jairus’ daughter and the woman with an issue of blood? What does this teach us?	Psalter #56
December 31	Luke 9:1–6	What were the apostles told to do if a city did not receive their message? What did this action symbolize?	Psalter #59
January 1	Luke 9:10–17	Why did Jesus command his disciples to feed the people in verse 13 even though he knew they did not have enough food to do so?	Psalter #63
January 2	Luke 9:7–9, 18–22	Why did Jesus instruct his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the promised Messiah?	Psalter #70
January 3	Luke 9:23–27	What are the three requirements for true discipleship that Jesus lists in verse 23? What does this teach us about the Christian life?	Psalter #72
January 4	Luke 9:28–36	What does the presence of Moses and Elijah at Jesus’ transfiguration reveal to us about Jesus?	Psalter #75
January 5	Luke 9:37–42	Why do you think the disciples were unable to cast the demon out of this boy?	Psalter #76
January 6	Luke 9:43–45	What is Jesus trying to teach his disciples by reminding them here of his impending suffering and death?	Psalter #79
January 7	Luke 9:46–50; Psalm 131	Why is humility an essential part of the Christian life?	Psalter #80

## Church News Ruth Baas

### BAPTISMS

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”  
Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:  
Makenna Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brandyn & Meghan Brummel—Calvary, IA  
Malachi James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan VanOverloop—Crete, IL  
Theo Reed, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin Warner—Crete, IL  
Lydia Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Brittany Koedam—Doon, IA  
Emma Lael, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Michelle VanEgdom—Doon, IA  
Daniel Ezra, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel & Kristen Schimmel—Southeast, MI  
Hazel June, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Caitlin Bartelds—Unity, MI  
Micah Christopher, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan & Lindsay Hassevoort—Unity, MI  
Piper Dawn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Grant & Jessica Lenting—Unity, MI  
Ryker Jude, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cody & Erika Slendebroek—Unity, MI  
Hadley Fay, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Tessa Talsma—Unity, MI

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:  
Traiton Cleveringa, Jason Pollema, Bryce VanMaanen, Levi VanRavenswaay—Calvary, IA  
Micah Regnerus—Randolph, WI  
David Holleman, Dylan Poortinga, Carter VanDer Griend—Peace, IN  
Grant VanOverloop—Unity, MI

### MARRIAGES

“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. T.J. Mastbergen & Ms. Samantha Velthouse—Byron Center, MI  
Mr. Triston VanBeek & Ms. Katie Vink—Doon, IA  
Mr. Austin Campbell & Ms. Riley Dykstra—First Holland, MI  
Mr. Brad Ellerbroek & Ms. Jessica Verbeek—Georgetown, MI  
Mr. Jeremy Zolen & Ms. Nikki Westra—Georgetown, MI  
Mr. Taylor Oomkes & Ms. Ruth Koerner—Grandville, MI  
Mr. Patrick Medemblik & Ms. Madalyn Bouma—Unity, MI  
Mr. Jared VanDyke & Ms. Ashley Cnossen—Unity, MI



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**Dear *Beacon Lights* subscribers,**

After much forethought and consideration, the staff of *Beacon Lights* has decided to redesign the look and format of the magazine, effective January 2022. The next issue of *Beacon Lights* that you receive will be the “new and improved” version.

We welcome your thoughts on the future of the magazine and on the upcoming design changes. Please feel free to send comments and questions to any of our staff members or congregational advocates. Thank you for your support of the *Beacon Lights* magazine!

Sincerely,  
***Beacon Lights* staff**