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February 2006

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Beloved, Let Us Love One Another

For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

I John 4:7-11

Humility and the Will of God

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. (Luke 9:23) In all matters pertaining to living faith, may God open not only our understanding but also our hearts to receive the *love of the truth (II Thessalonians 2:8-13)* which will make us free. And, once free, may He grant us the grace to *stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. (Galatians 5:1)*

If we would assume that, in denying ourselves those things of the world and of the flesh, and by witnessing for Christ, we might gain favor with God and add to our storehouse of grace through our own efforts, we would have much encouragement and help from the Devil. He knows only too well that grace will never be extended to him or his angels because of their desire to exalt self. (Isaiah 14:12-23) In Jude, verse 6, it says, *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

The Devil knows that our individual storehouses of grace have been filled to overflowing through the merits of Christ, and that anything we might try to add to it will be blown away like chaff. His motive for attempting to convince us that we must establish our own righteousness is that God, with justified anger, would remove our portion of grace from us, and our names from the Lamb's Book of Life. The reason being that, if we hold the death of his only begotten Son in such low regard that even this supreme sacrifice was not sufficient, we, in effect, tell Him that we (the creature) can do better than He (the Creator). The Word says *men worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. (Romans 1:25)* The spirit of self, or works righteousness, is one of the many wiles of the Devil with which he seeks to maintain or regain a death grip on our souls.

For this reason, I do not believe that our text means that, to deny ourselves and follow Him, we must first begin to clean out our houses and sweep and garnish them (Matthew 12:43-45). But rather, we must first acknowledge that we do not of ourselves have the ability to do so. *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)*

The word *deny*, according to Webster's Dictionary, means "to declare untrue; reject; disclaim." This is the first thing we must do. We must reject, disclaim, and declare as untrue any and all former concepts of virtue or good qualities we have felt or seen in ourselves--in spite of the degree of humility with which we have regarded or employed those qualities. A few of these might be self-assurance, self-

confidence, self-determination, self-control, self-respect, self-sufficiency, and most of all self-righteousness. This would also include vanity and any pride we might have in our selves: our material possessions, abilities, achievements, goals, and so on.

We can only be saved by grace (Ephesians 2:1-9) through faith in Christ and his merits and righteousness. We do turn away from former lusts *as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance (I Peter 1:14)*; that is, the world and *the things that are in the world (I John 2:15)*. And, as we do so, we find these things replaced with *the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)*.

Fruit is the key word. Jesus told his disciples, *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)* The Apostle Paul said likewise, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:13)*

All things that we do through Christ must remain just that: things we do through Christ. These things, whatever they may be, are the outward manifestations of our faith (James 2:19-26), our Christianity. They can never be allowed to *become* our Christianity, or the reason we are saved. Jesus Christ alone is the reason. (Matthew 1:21, Acts 4:8-12)

He is also that door through which we must go (John 10:1-11). And we must go through on our knees. The unjust steward had not denied himself; therefore he said, *To beg I am ashamed. (Luke 16:3)* He remained a child of the world, of whom all such will hear on the Day of Judgment, *Depart from me, ye cursed. (Matthew 25:41)*

It appears, from God's Word, that blind Bartimaeus, the beggar, fared much better. Even though afflicted with blindness--spiritual blindness--he was aware of where he was; namely, on the road between Heaven and hell: Jerusalem and Jericho. The text (Mark 10:46-52) does not indicate how far out of Jericho Bartimaeus was, but with God's grace resting upon him, he realized where he was headed in his blindness. So he stopped where he was. Perhaps he felt the increasing nearness of Christ. In any case, we read that he sat by the side of the highway, begging. Note also the word *highway*. This was definitely not the narrow way.

Seeing this, one might ask what Jesus was doing on this road. In fact, it says that Jesus *went out of Jericho. (Mark 10:46)* I believe this can be answered from Mark 2:15-17, which says in part, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Bartimaeus, when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, immediately knew that here lay his only hope of salvation. He began to cry, *Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal.* (Verses 47-48)

Through God's humbling grace, believing God's Word, and being diligent in his seeking -- for *he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6)* -- Bartimaeus was saved. He cast off his garment of self-righteousness so that he might receive the garment of salvation. He received his spiritual sight. And when Jesus said, *Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole (Mark 10:52)*, he, instead, followed Jesus in the way. He knew his own way would be the way of the flesh. Therefore, he denied himself and followed Jesus.

"He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

The Bible speaks much of humility. To those of us who have received a true awakening to the knowledge of our former sinful lives, and our miserable failure to live good lives, or by our own goodness to become acceptable to God, it is sufficient confirmation of what Paul wrote: *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . . I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.* (Romans 7:18, 21, 25)

And so it is with us. Our own strength, our own willpower, our own goodness, and our own ability to do that which is according to the will of God is absolutely worthless, if not nonexistent. It is a mockery of his grace, mercy, and righteousness which alone can bring peace and eternal joy to our undying souls.

From the time of our conversion, we struggle constantly with this three-fold enemy: the world, the Devil, and our own flesh. The flesh thrives on vanity and pride -- how we look, what nice things we own, what we have done, or can do, or are going to do. (James 4:13-17) Much of the Bible deals with these matters. But, as with all things pertaining to, and resulting in, a saving faith, we must receive a hunger and thirst for the truth. *Ye have not, because ye ask not.* (James 4:2)

The truth that will lead us to eternal life is the whole Word of God. As the Psalmist wrote, *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* (Psalm 119:105) If we come to a portion of the Word that seems offensive or contrary to our own will or

understanding so that we reject it, that light goes out and we lose the way.

We can look at some examples of humility, the carnal will, and the will of God in familiar portions of the Word. Here we see John the Baptist's humility: *He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. (John 1:27)* He did not glory in the fact that God had chosen him to prepare the way for Christ. Also consider the humility of the centurion who said to Christ, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (Matthew 8:8)*

The miracle of the fishes is a perfect example of the value of our own efforts as compared to doing his will according to his instructions. (Luke 5:1-9) After the great catch, Peter said, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. (Luke 5:8)* In Peter, before his conversion, we are shown an example of a man who thought himself humble. On the occasion when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), although it was representative of spiritual cleansing, the act itself was one that Peter was not going to allow. He told Jesus, *Thou shalt never wash my feet. (John 13:8)* This was a pretty strong statement, but no stronger than one we might make in our spiritual infancy. As Jesus said, *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. (Matthew 22:29)*

To Peter's proud declaration, Jesus replied, *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. (John 13:8)* Upon hearing this, Peter's own humility was replaced with that true humility from the heart, desiring only the Lord's will, and submitting to it unashamed. Peter then said, *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head (Verse 9),* signifying *I believe*, and indicating our walk, our works, our will, and our understanding.

But still Peter did not understand his inability to do the right thing. Jesus told Peter, *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:32)* Jesus knew that the conversion of the disciples would not take place until after his resurrection, when they would receive the Holy Ghost (and the strength that is found only through Christ). But Peter, placing his faith in his own ability, said, *Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. But Jesus said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. (Luke 22:33-34)* Later in this chapter, we see the fulfillment of this.

We also know that after his conversion (new birth), his weaknesses were overcome. As the Lord told the Apostle Paul, *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

(II Corinthians 12:9) That is to say, as our self decreases, Christ will increase in us in like measure. For every cup of filth or evil (*dross - Proverb 25:4*) that is drawn out of this vessel of clay, it is replaced with at least a cup of his goodness. Without his grace, however, this cannot be done.

If we attempt, through our own works, to overcome evil with good, we merely remove the dirt from the outside of the vessel (*Matthew 23:25-33*). And, although we might feel better about ourselves, our efforts and religion are vain (*Mark 7:6-8*). And not only this, but we do, in deed, frustrate the grace of God, for the Word says, *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:21)*

The counsel we receive through the Apostle John is this: *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (I John 2:6)* How did Jesus walk?

First, in love. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)*

Second, in truth. *I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)*

Third, in the light. *I am the light of the world. (John 8:12)*

Fourth, in humility. *I am meek and lowly in heart. (Matthew 11:29)*

Fifth, in the will of God. *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. (Luke 22:42)*

We find these instructions for our own walk:

In love. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)*

"Love one another, as I have loved you."

In truth. *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth. (John 14:16-17)*

In the light. *Ye are the light of the world . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14, 16)*

In humility. *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 14:11)*

In the will of God. *For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. (Matthew 12:50)*

Now if we are to come to true repentance, which is the will of God for all of us, we must first question our *self* (our own goodness and our righteousness, whatever it may be), and seek the way of salvation. This can only be accomplished by the grace of God through prayer and his unerring, holy Word. We cannot, as many do in this dusk of the latter days, only read of, and claim for ourselves, the promises of eternal life and joy that God has given. These promises are only to those who have been awakened to their lost condition due to their sin, who have travailed in and received new spiritual birth. The way into the kingdom of Heaven has been revealed to them through much prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the working of the Holy Ghost within them.

In the Old Testament, the conditions God accepts are written as *a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart. (Psalm 51:17)* The blood that formerly had to be shed annually and sprinkled on the mercy seat for atonement has now been shed once, on the cross. And if our sorrow is true, it is sprinkled upon our hearts as we hear the blood speak forgiveness through the mouths of Christ's servants. *He that heareth you heareth me. (Luke 10:6)*

This is the simplicity of the Gospel. And God, through his Holy Spirit, will lead us, if, from pure hearts, we send up our prayers to Him. These prayers are as incense was in the Old Testament. They are a sweet-smelling savor to God, coming from penitent souls and obedient children, seeking his lovingkindness and counsel. *He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

To all those who are still outside of this kingdom of living faith, but truly desire to be a part of this remnant who will be saved (Romans 9:27), Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, pleads with you while the door of grace is still open. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. (II Corinthians 13:14)

Dennis Piilola
Butte, Montana

In Loving Memory of Bernice Somero

September 16, 1954-June 1, 2005

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (III John 1:4)

Bernice was born in Marquette, Michigan, and lived also in Watton, Michigan and New Ipswich, New Hampshire with her parents. She took care of her mother until her death in 1985. Bernice was a member of the Apostolic Lutheran Church.

In 1992, she married Roger Somero, and they were blessed with two sons, Peter and Reuben. She was a loving wife and mother, and spent much time with her family, traveling and home-schooling her sons. One of the boys later said, "She taught us many things; i.e., 'Don't go with unbelievers, don't smoke,' and so on."

Bernice was diagnosed with cancer in March 2004. She accepted what God allowed in her life, and was not one to complain, even though she suffered a lot of pain. She had numerous treatments and operations, and died on June 1, 2005. In her last days at the hospital, she had over a hundred visitors. Her doctor told me that we have a tremendous family. Indeed the family of God is the most tremendous family on earth.

Bernice's primary concern was the salvation of her soul and the souls of others. She would warn others of the sins of the world, and prayed for the unbelievers and for those who had left the faith.

Following is the story of a vision seen by her niece's three-year-old daughter who had come from Washington state for Bernice's funeral.

*Roger Somero
New Ipswich, New Hampshire*

"I Saw Him Before!"

Aleighta Warnke
Three years old

A week after we returned from Auntie Bernice's funeral, My daughter, Aleigha, was looking at a children's Bible with Cara Helmes. Cara showed Aleigha pictures of Jesus, and they talked about them. They came to a picture of Jesus in the sky with his arms open wide. I heard Aleigha say, "I saw Him before!"

I asked her, "What, Aleigha?"

She pointed to Him and said again, "I saw Him before!"

"Where did you see Him?"

"At the church."

"What church?" I asked.

"At the wedding church." Aleigha called the funeral a wedding. (Which it was.) Then she looked at me and said, "I love Bernice." This whole time, Aleigha had a different look. She was very serious, concentrating on what she was saying.

I asked more questions, such as "What was Jesus doing at the wedding church?"

"He was talking to Bernice."

"Was Bernice lying down or standing up?"

"She was standing up, with a flower dress--pink on it," she said.

Aleigha saw a picture of an angel in the children's Bible. "The angel was up in the sky, in the mountains, in the clouds," she said. "The door opened."

"What door?" I asked. "Do you mean a gate?"

Her eyes got big and she said, "Yeah, a gate! The angel opened the gate and Bernice went in." She showed us with her hands how the gate opened and closed. She also told us that the gate was yellow, and that there were "lots of people inside the gate." The angel was white and had wings, she explained, but Jesus didn't have wings. Then she said, "But Bernice can't get out. She wants the gate open."

I assured her that "Bernice is with Jesus, and she doesn't want to get out. She loves it in there."

"Oh, she likes it in there?" Aleigha seemed very relieved. I realize now that she had been nervous that Bernice was stuck inside the gate because every day before our conversation she would say, "I want Bernice. I love her, but I miss her." Now that she has told us about what she saw, she doesn't ask for Bernice anymore because she knows she is in Heaven with Jesus.

*Heidi Warnke, mother of Aleigha
Amboy, Washington*

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is divided into three parts, treating, respectively, the three persons of the Holy Trinity: the first, of the Father, the second, of the Son, and the third, of the Holy Spirit. The Creed contains the most important articles of faith. All other articles of belief depend upon them.

Observe that there are two ways of believing. In the first place, I may have a faith concerning God. This is the case when I hold to be true what is said concerning God. Such faith is on the same level with the assent I give to the statements concerning the Devil and hell. A faith of this kind should rather be called knowledge or information than faith.

In the second place, there is faith in God. Such faith is mine when I not only hold to be true what is said concerning God, but also when I put my trust in Him in such a way as to enter into personal relations with Him, believing firmly that I shall find Him to be and to do as I have been taught. Not in any man do I believe thus, however highly he may be praised. I may be readily induced to believe a man's piety, but that is no reason why I should build upon him.

Such faith, which ventures everything upon what it has heard concerning God, be it life or death, constitutes the Christian man, and it receives everything of God it desires. Such a faith cannot tolerate a false and wicked heart; it is a living faith, such as the first commandment, which says, I am thy God; thou shalt have no other gods.

The word *in* is well chosen and deserves due attention. We do not say, I believe God the Father, or concerning God the Father; but *in* God the Father, *in* Jesus Christ, and *in* the Holy Ghost. Such faith no one may claim but God alone. It is a confession of the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit that we believe in these as we believe in the Father. And inasmuch as the faith in one person of the Trinity is identical to that in the other two, it follows that the three persons are one God.

The First Article of the Creed

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and earth."

This means that I renounce the evil spirit, all idolatry, all witchcraft, and all false faith. I place my confidence in no human being upon earth, nor even in myself, nor in my power, art, possessions, piety, or anything I may have.

I put my trust in no creature, be it in Heaven or upon earth. I venture to put my trust in the one God, who has created Heaven and earth and is above all creatures, absolutely beyond my sight and ken. Further, I am not dismayed by all the wickedness of the Devil and his associates, for my God is above them all.

Though I should be forsaken and persecuted by all men, nevertheless I shall believe in God. Although I may be poor and humble, unlearned and despised, aye, bereft of everything, I shall believe, nonetheless, in God.

I believe, even though I am a sinner; for far above all things that are and that are not--above all sin, all virtue, above all things soars my faith, abiding in God, pure and unsullied.

No matter how long He tarries, I will trust in Him. I will prescribe no bounds for Him as to purpose, time, measure and method; in sincere and upright faith, I leave all things to his divine will.

Since He is almighty, what can I lack that He is unable to give or perform?

Since He is the creator of Heaven and earth and Lord of all things, who will deprive me of anything, or harm me? Indeed, how can all things fail to serve my welfare since I enjoy his favor, and all things are under his authority and control?

Being God, He possess both the power and the wisdom to secure my highest welfare; being Father, He will surely do that which is best, and delight in doing so.

Inasmuch as I doubt none of these things and put my trust in Him, I am sure of being his child, servant, and heir forever; and I shall receive even according to my faith.

The Second Article of the Creed

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord."

This means that I believe not only that Jesus Christ is eternal and divine by nature, being begotten in eternity as God's true and only Son, but also that He has received power over all things from the Father in that, according to his divine nature, He has created with the Father.

I confess that no one can believe in the Father and find access to Him through science, works, reason, or anything that may be named in Heaven and upon earth except in and through Jesus Christ, his Son--through faith in his name and dominion.

"Conceived by the Holy Ghost."

I believe firmly that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost for my good, without the agency of man or of the flesh, without a natural father or seed, and that He was so conceived for the purpose of purifying and making spiritual, through his and the Almighty Father's gracious will, the sinful, carnal, impure, and damnable conception of all those who believe in Him.

"Born of the Virgin Mary."

I believe that He was born for me from Mary, the pure virgin, without defilement of her bodily and spiritual virginity, to the end that He, according to the Father's merciful purpose, might render blessed, harmless, and pure my birth, through which I became subject to sin and condemnation.

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

I believe that Christ has borne his sufferings and the cross for my sins and the sins of all believers, whereby He has blessed every tribulation and every cross, thus rendering them beneficial and profitable.

"Was crucified, dead, and buried."

I believe that He suffered death and burial in order to destroy and bury my sins and those of all believers; and that thereby temporal death has been rendered harmless, profitable, and salutary.

"He descended into hell."

I believe that He descended into hell in order to quench and to crush for my good and that of all believers, the Devil and all his might, wiles, and wickedness, thus breaking his power henceforth to harm me; and I believe that He has redeemed me from the torments of hell, rendering them harmless to me.

"The third day He rose again from the dead."

I believe that on the third day, He rose from the dead in order to give me and all believers newness of life, thus awakening me by his grace and Spirit to a life in which I ever shun what is sinful, and serve Him in every grace and every virtue.

"He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty."

I believe that He ascended into Heaven, and has received from the Father power and honor above all angels and creatures; that He

accordingly sits at the right hand of God; that is, that He is King and Lord over all that belongs to God, whether it be in Heaven, in hell, or on earth. For this reason, He can help me and all believers in every need, in defiance of all our adversaries and enemies.

"From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

Thence, from Heaven, He shall return on the last day to judge the living that shall then be found on the earth, and the dead who meanwhile have passed away. I believe that all men, all angels, and devils shall be haled before his judgment seat and behold him face to face, and I believe that He shall deliver my body and those of all believers from death and every infirmity; that He shall mete out eternal punishment to our foes and adversaries, and deliver us from their power forever.

The Third Article of the Creed

"I believe in the Holy Ghost."

That is, I not only believe that the Holy Ghost, in his union with the Father and the Son, is truly God; but I also believe that the coming to the Father through Christ, his life, passion, and death, and whatever is related thereto, is rendered possible and obtained only through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, and in Christ, I am moved, aroused, invited, and drawn to God. But the power through which this is done is the Holy Spirit. He restores me to life, holiness, and a spiritual existence. Thus He brings me to the Father; for He is the power by which the Father, through and in Christ, works and gives life.

"The holy Christian Church."

I believe that there exists on earth, throughout the entire world, but one holy universal Christian Church, which is nothing else than the communion of saints--of the righteous and believing people on earth. And it is gathered, preserved, and governed by the Holy Spirit, and daily increased by means of the Word of God.

I believe that no one can be saved unless he is found in this communion, is in hearty fellowship with her, and makes her faith, her Word, her sacrament, her love, his own. I believe that no heretic, no heathen, or any of her adversaries can find salvation unless he has been reconciled and restored to fellowship and concord with this Church in all things.

"The communion of saints."

I believe that, in this Christian communion, all things are in common, and that no one has exclusive possession of his own. For

this reason I, and every believer, must be benefited, succored, and strengthened by the prayers and good works of the entire communion at all times, in life and in death. Thus, each bears the burdens of the others, as Saint Paul teaches in Galatians 6:2.

"The forgiveness of sins."

I believe that in this communion, but nowhere else, there is forgiveness of sin; that outside her pale there is no provision for the forgiveness of sin, however numerous and conspicuous good works may be; that the number, the greatness, and the frequency of sins within her pale cannot override the provision existing for forgiveness as long as this one communion abides. To her, Christ gives the keys, saying, *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)* The same in substance is said by Christ to Peter, an individual, as the representative of each true church, *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)*

"The resurrection of the body."

I believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead when, through the same Holy Ghost, there shall be an awakening of all people. I believe that all mankind, both the good and the wicked, shall arise in a new body.

"And the life everlasting."

I believe that the Resurrection shall be succeeded by an everlasting life on the part of believers, and an everlasting death on the part of unbelieving sinners.

"Amen."

And in no way do I doubt that the Father, through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit will cause me to experience all these things. This is what is meant by the word *Amen*, which signifies that these things are certain and shall surely come to pass.

Martin Luther

Blessed and Forgiven

A man is blessed when his sins are forgiven. I think the greatest blessing we can receive here in this life is that we can receive the forgiveness of all our sins as we hear that blessed Gospel of forgiveness proclaimed in Jesus' name and atoning blood.

I can remember when I was a boy, we stayed with my grandfather for a year. When I was older and could understand, I was told that he was a minister of God, a servant of the Most High. He moved his family from one state to another. In the new community, he went to the neighbors and talked to them about salvation and the meaning of repentance. Some made a mockery of him, but that did not deter him. He continued going about the neighborhood proclaiming the need for repentance and faith in Jesus. Finally, there were souls who became awakened, and one couple repented of their sins. Finally, this congregation grew as more repented. He was able to preach repentance as Jesus told his disciples to do. He proclaimed that blessed Gospel to the ones who were awakened and in need of salvation.

I remember that I went with my grandfather to house meetings, as there was no church erected at that time. My parents were not in faith then, so they did not attend. I remember that many people rejoiced at the services, with their arms around one another. I did not understand then, but I did much later when God gave me the grace to repent and I received the forgiveness of my sins.

One day, I went to my mother (my stepmother, actually, as my mother passed away when I was a year old). I asked her forgiveness for being a disobedient boy. She broke down, weeping, and begged for forgiveness, for she was unable to proclaim in Jesus' name and blood the forgiveness of my sins. She asked for the blessing herself. What a joy it was to bless my mother!

She felt like a real mother to me. I remember my childhood, when she chastised me when I had it coming. I later had much respect for her, for she brought me up in the way she thought was right. She had the knowledge of the Christian faith; her father was a preacher. When I received grace to repent, those memories of my grandfather came into my heart, and I knew what those Christians had been rejoicing about. They were rejoicing in Jesus, in the love that Christ had for them. They were asking forgiveness for their faults and shortcomings. Then I truly understood what a blessing it was to be among the children of God, for they had the authority to forgive sins to one another.

What a blessing we have even now. If there is anyone who has not yet tasted of the graciousness of the Lord, may they come to realize how sinful they are, and what their sins have caused our Lord and Saviour.

Truly it is a blessing that we have this Word with us, and that it still goes forth. God said, *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)* May it penetrate the hearts of the hearers. We can only proclaim the Word, and God's Spirit will bring effect into the heart.

Joe Wirkkala

Children's Page

Dear Children,

When we finished the story last month, King Herod was threatening Jesus' life. Some of you already know what happened next. Let's look into Matthew 2:13.

He Shall be Called a Nazarene

The Wise Men returned to their own country another way because they were told by God not to go back to Herod.

Joseph and Mary lived in their home in Bethlehem, tending to baby Jesus, and most likely still marveling over the Wise Men's visit. They went to bed for the night, and *behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. (Matthew 2:13)*

Immediately, they started on their way. Joseph was not going to wait until daylight, as the cover of night would hide them, and he did not want anything to happen to Jesus.

They lived in Egypt *until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. (Verse 15)*

Oh, but Herod was angry when he found out that the Wise Men left without telling him where Jesus was. As the Bible says, *Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.*

He was so angry that he decided to try to kill baby Jesus in this way. He did some thinking, and figured that from the time when the Wise Men saw the star, up to the present, would have been almost two years, and that would make Jesus about two years old. It was a very sad time for many a home, but little Jesus was safe in Egypt.

Time passed and Herod died. Again an angel came to Joseph in a dream, saying, *Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the*

young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. (Verses 20-21)

But when Joseph learned that Herod's son, Archelaus, was ruling over Israel, Joseph did not want to live near him because he did not trust him. *Being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee. (Verse 22)*

Joseph, Mary, and little Jesus arrived in the town of Nazareth, and that's where they made their home. The Bible says, *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. (Verse 23)* This was God's plan.

Traveling in those days was not as easily done as it is now. One had to walk, or maybe ride on the back of a horse or a donkey, as Mary did. Some people had camels or chariots, but for the most part, traveling was slow and tiresome. My, how weary of traveling Joseph and Mary must have become. Finally, in Nazareth, they could at last settle into family life. Mary and Joseph could watch Jesus grow, and grow He did.

There were many things Mary kept in her heart about her son. Surely He was different from other children in that He did not sin. Oh, He played like children do, and He helped with chores, I'm sure, but we all know He was very special because He was the Son of God.

We can be happy that Jesus was born, and that we can believe in Him, knowing that He lives in our hearts. He is the best friend we could ever have. No one watches over us better than He does.

Praise God for sending us his only Son. Let us all ask God for hearts that want to do his will.

*In God's peace,
Gwen Wilson*

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-25

A Melody of Love

God speaks to us in bird and song;
In winds that drift the clouds along;
Above the din of toil and wrong,
A melody of love.

God speaks to us in far and near;
In peace of home and friends most dear;
From the dim past and present,
A melody of love.

God speaks to us in darkest night,
By quiet ways through mornings bright,
When shadows fall with evening light,
A melody of love.

God speaks to us in every land,
On wave-lapp'd shore and silent strand;
By kiss of child, and touch of hand,
A melody of love.

Voice divine, speak Thou to me!
Beyond the earth, beyond the sea:
First let me hear, then sing to thee
A melody of love.

Joseph Johnson, 1849-1926

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Isaiah 51:3