

THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL (LUKE 2-3:22)

The "Christmas Story", or the "Christ-More Story" as I like to call it, as "mas" means "more" in Spanish, and then also, as we looked at over the past few weeks, and therefore know, according to the Word of God, there is more to the story of our just celebrating the birth of Christ Jesus, of Jesus being born in Bethlehem by the virgin Mary, through the Holy Spirit, and that He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger. There were the 3 wise men, who had brought to Jesus, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, yet they went back east to their homes, and there were the shepherds, watching their flocks at night, who were given "good tidings of great joy" by an angel, who was joined by a multitude of the heavenly host. Yet, after they too had seen Jesus, they went back to their flocks. Yet, they would never be the same after encountering Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the only begotten Son of God, who would take away the sins of the world, to all who would believe on Him and receive Him. The "more of the story" that we'll see in our passage of Scripture in **Luke 2** and **3** is that by the grace of God, the unmerited favor of God, from the beginning, led others and now leads us to the sharing of the gospel, the good tidings of great joy, of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of God. As was the case with the shepherds and the wise men, we don't continue though in gazing at the baby Jesus. Our encounter with Christ Jesus IS intended to be life-changing, as it was within the generation at the time of Christ Jesus. As we are told, we are to **keep** "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". We are then also a living testimony to the gospel, the good tidings of great joy that we have found in Christ Jesus. We are then living our lives accordingly, to Christ Jesus being **Immanuel, God is with us**, meaning we having a relationship with Him and our Heavenly Father, as children of God. His Spirit testifies (bears witness) to our spirit (He lets us know) that we are children of God (**Romans 8:16**), to those who have believed on and received Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"-**John 1:12-13**). From there, we then bear the fruit of the Spirit, that dwells in us, "love, joy, peace, patience (longsuffering), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (**Galatians 5:22-23**)

For those who were with us last Sunday, there is one element missing in that. We are being led to believe on Jesus as being the Christ, the Savior of the world, who died on a cross for our sins. He bore our sins upon Himself. He died on that cross, yet, and He conquered death, sin, and evil, as He rose from the grave on the third day, making a way for us too, to overcome that sting of death and then have eternal life in Him! A part of that process of being born-again is in knowing God's love for us through Christ Jesus (**John 3:16-17**). We are then responding by loving Him as He has first loved us (**1 John 4:19**), and He is calling and leading us to **repentance**. It is God, through His Holy Spirit, who

is calling and leading us to repentance, (metanoeo), recognizing a need for change and heeding to that need, turning to God for forgiveness of our sins, and to receive Him and His Righteousness, to receive the Holy Spirit, so as to be, born-again, as we are turning away from continuing to sin against God and turning to Him for His Righteousness. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—" (John 14:15-16) Keep His commandments, what is that? Jesus said that the whole of the law and of the prophets hangs on us loving God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and then to also love others as ourselves. (Mark 12:30-31) While we are not following the Mosaic law of the Old Covenant, we are following the doctrine, or teaching of Jesus. As the Apostle John tells us, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9) Similarly, to what Jesus had said about keeping His commandments, the Apostle Peter, in speaking to the High Priest and the Chief Priests, who had told Peter and the other apostles to stop preaching Christ Jesus, he said, "We ought to obey God rather than men. [that is a heart of repentance] The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel [and then to all nations according to the Great Commission] and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:29-32) Just as the Apostle John said that those who obey the teachings of Christ has both the Father and the Son, after Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit to those who obey God, He said this, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23)

For He is and wants to be, our Immanuel, God with us! Speaking of keeping His Word, we were given the Great Commandment, and then also the Great Commission. Jesus told His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) Immanuel, God is with us. We will become then, like Christ, as we are obedient to His Great Commandments, and the Great Commission, as the fruit of the Spirit then works in us, to be sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus, as the grace of God, leads us in the gospel, the good news of Christ Jesus, to then to share it and Christ with others! As we have believe on Christ, as we are led in repentance, and we then receive Him, we then live the remainder of our lives in our faith in Christ and obedience to Christ, and live in and according to His righteousness. As Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The prophet, John the Baptist was, as it was written by Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare **the way of the Lord**; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (**Isaiah 40:3**) John the Baptist was preparing the way for the Lord, preparing God's people for the Coming One, and then the finality of his work was when he baptized Jesus, and then also proclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29**) The angel Gabriel had said to Zacharias the priest, John the Baptist's father, "he will turn many of the children of Israel **to the Lord their God.**" (**Luke 1:16**) That is what is referred to as repentance. The message that John the Baptist preached was, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Matthew 3:2**) Luke tells us that he was "preaching a baptism of **repentance, for the remission of sins.**" (**Luke 3:3**) He was preparing the way calling for the people to repent (to have a change of mind, to turn to God and away from their sin) and that Jesus would save them of their sins against God, for He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Savior of the world, to all who will believe on Him. To all who will cry out, "save me Lord Jesus!" "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." (**Romans 10:13**) That is a condition of the heart! "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." (**2 Corinthians 7:10**) Godly sorrow! As the Holy Spirit leads you to repent, it is not to just bring about sorrow, but to lead you to Christ Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life! "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (**Isaiah 9:6**) He is the Prince of shalom, to which we can have the peace that surpasses all understanding (**Philippians 4:7**) and then as shalom also implies, we can have wholeness, completeness in Christ Jesus, within ourselves, in fellowship with other people, and with God. The Christ-More story, that isn't just a story but is as Jesus had proclaimed in **John 14:6**, saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

=====
Christ Born of Mary (Luke 2:1-7)

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Glory in the Highest (Luke 2:8-20)

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the

Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you **good tidings** [euangelizomai] **of great joy** [chara-properly, recognizing of God's grace, favor] which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior [soter-sotierology=the study of salvation through Christ], who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." [That was a sign based upon the prophesy given to King Ahaz through Isaiah the prophet, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. [they were "evangelizing", sharing the good news of great joy!] And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Circumcision of Jesus (Luke 2:21)

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. ["Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matt. 5:17)]

Jesus Presented in the Temple (Luke 2:22-24)

Now when the days of her [Mary's] purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Simeon Sees God's Salvation (Luke 2:25-35)

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in **peace** [eirene, same as shalom: wholeness, completeness], according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, **a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles**, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at

those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." [some, hearts of repentance, other hearts such as the Pharisees and scribes, etc., hearts of selfish ambition, pride, rebellion against God]

Anna Bears Witness to the Redeemer (Luke 2:36-38)

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. [she too evangelized!]

The Family Returns to Nazareth (Luke 2:39-40)

So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. [The "charis" of God was upon Him. That is the root to the word "charisma", which we attribute to having a pleasant and outgoing personality. That is the worldly form of that, but the "charis" or grace of God is what leads to the evangelizing, the sharing the good news, with others as with the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna.]

The Boy Jesus (Luke 2:41-52)

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Luke 3:1-6)

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the

wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

John Preaches to the People (Luke 3:7-20)

Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

John Baptizes Jesus (Luke 3:21-22)

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

=====

Likewise, to those who are in Christ Jesus, as we are bearing the fruit of the Spirit, sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Christ, as we know Him, and are sharing Christ with others, in word and deed, we look to our Lord and Savior to one day saying to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

(Matthew 25:21) Enter into the chara, the favor, the grace, the joy, of the Lord, as we put our trust in Him, Christ Jesus our Savior & Lord!