

The people that
walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

—Isaiah 9:2



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from the Responsive Reading

Isaiah 9:2, 6

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

Isaiah's prophecy was welcomed by the Hebrew people as the promise of a national savior. Early Christians, familiar with these and similar verses from their Jewish upbringing, interpreted Christ Jesus' advent and ministry as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. (Matthew 1:22, 23, for instance, associates the events surrounding the Christ child's birth with Isaiah 7:14.)

According to a commentary, a change took place in the Christian viewpoint in the second century AD. From that time, "Jesus is not to be believed because the prophets foretold him, but rather the prophets are to be believed to be true prophets, because Christ bore witness to them."

from Section 1

4 | Proverbs 14:1

Every wise woman buildeth her house.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, wisdom is associated with feminine qualities and personified as a woman. This verse presents wisdom as crucial in early household management, a role widely associated with women in the Old Testament. A similar idea is expressed by references to "mother's

house" (see examples in Genesis 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Song of Solomon 3:4).

from Section 2

10 | Matthew 2:4–6

When [Herod] had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Micah 5:2 is the prophecy cited here: "Thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Ephratah, or *Ephrath*, was Bethlehem's earliest name (see Genesis 35:19). The spelling *Beth-lehem*, used throughout the Old Testament, indicates the words that make up the Hebrew name: *bēth lehem*, "house of bread."

10 | Matthew 2:11

When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

In ancient times, frankincense and myrrh were valued as highly as gold. Derived from

An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“... a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

the resin of trees found almost exclusively in Arabia and northeast Africa, these costly substances—sometimes in such demand as to fill entire boatloads—were used in perfume, cosmetics, incense, salves, and burial treatments for thousands of years. Frankincense was especially prized in Hebrew temple worship; myrrh was a main ingredient of anointing oils, skin-care products, and medicines.

from Section 3

12 | Luke 2:46

After three days they found [Jesus] in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

A scholar writes, “Hearing and asking questions’ is the regular Jewish phrase for a student learning from his teachers.” Yet Jesus’ interchange with the rabbis goes far beyond learning from them. The account records their recognition of his knowledge: “All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” (v. 47).

from Section 5

20 | Acts 3:2

A certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

According to Hebrew law, no one who was deformed or blemished was allowed to make offerings in the Temple (see Leviticus 21:16–23). Peter and John’s outreach to the lame man was both inclusive and redemptive, embracing the outcast and healing his infirmity.

“Received strength” (v. 7) is translated from a form of the Greek word *stereō*, meaning to be strengthened or to be firmly established. Interestingly, this term also appears in a description of growth in the early Christian churches: “And so were the churches established [*stereō*] in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).

from Section 6

22 | I John 1:3

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

At the time of this writing, Christians were no longer unified—even in the face of Jewish hostility against them. One researcher observes: “A community that has been united through a period of persecution by Jewish authorities has split over interpretation of Jesus and salvation. Its author seeks to reassure readers that they possess the truth revealed through Jesus.”

First John counsels fellowship that overcomes doctrinal differences. Another source writes, “The simple fact is that, if we are ever to find fellowship with one another and fellowship with God, and if we are ever to find true joy, we must find them in Jesus Christ.”

Resources quoted in this issue

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Cit. 12: Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Luke*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Cit. 22: Metzger, Bruce M., and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; Barclay, William. *The Letters of John and Jude*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Christmas: Revealing our innocence

By Beulah M. Roegge

From the December 1996 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*

Christmas portrays an innocence—a freedom from sin and guilt—that wise men and women, shepherds, and other toilers have yearned for through the ages.

The biblical chronicle of man's God-derived innocence, foreshadowing Christ Jesus' life and example, begins with the first chapter of the first book of the Holy Bible. There it is revealed that man, male and female, not only is created by God but is perceived as being very good—that is, without sin or the capability of sinning. Subsequent allegorical and historical accounts of sinful behavior dimmed the vision of this ideal man. Christmas offers an opportunity to clear the vision and rediscover the genuine, incorruptible, sinless nature of us all.

Why do we celebrate each year, on a date historically inauthentic, the birth of a babe? Might it not be that, whether we realize it or not, Jesus' birth and saving ministry show us who we actually are as God's children? They illustrate that despite human appearances, God is the Father of us all; therefore the true genesis of our being is immaculate, our real substance is always new, a fresh flowering of eternal Life. Viewing our origin from this perspective, we see that redemption is not really a patchwork reconstruction of a mortal. It is the reappearing of a perfection that is inherent in man and inviolate.

Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' lifework, which reveals amazing possibilities of what can be accomplished by people when they're unshackled by sin. His life attested to the fact that innocence is more than an absence of evil but is a confirmation of the activity of good on earth. It tells us that matter, the soil of mortality and

sin, submits to the pure demonstration of divine Love.

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6). We may consider these words of Isaiah not only as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus but also as a renewable prophecy in our lives. As we forsake the sophistry of systems that allow for self-justification, and turn wholeheartedly to God as a little child, we find purification. Childlike innocence enables us to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven.

Celebrating Christmas can be a celebration of our own rebirth. In an article entitled “The New Birth,” Mary Baker Eddy writes, “What a faith-lighted thought is this! that mortals can lay off the ‘old man,’ until man is found to be the image of the infinite good that we name God, and the fulness of the stature of man in Christ appears” (*Miscellaneous Writings 1883–1896*, p. 15).

Whether we observe these days in quiet solitude, or by participating in family festivities, or at present in circumstances of deprivation, we can expect to feel a childlike joy, for this is the hope of Christmas.

As we allow Christ Jesus' life to deepen our understanding of God, of his Father and our Father, we find our native innocence restored. Unhappy memories lose their torment and happy ones are refurbished. The joy of Christmas includes the promise that our understanding of Christ will so mature that we will be able to emulate ever more closely the works of our Master.

To read the entire article, which has been shortened to fit this page, go to jsh.christianscience.com/Christmas-revealing-our-innocence.