

The Presence Of Christ Come

Luke tells us Mary ‘brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn’. With these simple words the presence of the infant Christ in the world is recorded. The conditions of the Saviour’s birth were basic and humble, yet angels rejoiced to see it and the heavenly host sang, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men’.

For our sakes He became poor

The grim conditions of Jesus’ birth suggest neither Joseph nor Mary had relatives in Bethlehem, there was no house to go to, no friends waiting to receive them. Since so little notice is taken of them it probably implies relative poverty and meanness. Had they been wealthy, or prominent, they would have been cared for and room made for them, especially since Mary, little more than a girl herself, was about to give birth to her first child. It was heartless to consign her to a stable in this condition.

In the cause of the poor and needy

We learn Mary personally swaddled her new-born baby. There was no midwife, no helper, no support. We can only admire her strength. Far from home and isolated Mary, ‘brought forth her firstborn son: and ... called his name JESUS’. It is as though the meanness of Christ’s birth was designed to depict the nature of His coming. Our Lord Jesus laid aside all glory to identify with His poor, needy people. Though He is God and equal with God, yet He ‘made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men’.

‘Behold’

Nor was angelic help provided for the young mother, no easing of distress, or supply of comfort to Mary and her baby. What God’s angels did was gladly announce the birth of the Messiah. ‘Behold’ excites attention and emphasises the wonderful peace and joy being revealed to God’s people who ‘looked for redemption in Israel’. It would be thirty years before the Lord would begin His ministry but on this night an announcement to a group of shepherds was appropriate.

A chosen audience

It is very suitable that the first notice of Christ’s birth was given not to chief priests and learned men at Jerusalem, but to common, and otherwise unremarkable men whom God is pleased to choose and call. God hides His ways from the wise and prudent, to their confusion, while the wonder of His ways, and the glory of His grace is revealed to the poor and the despised. Of such is the kingdom of heaven, to such the gospel is savingly preached, and by such it was carried to the ends of the earth.

The Word made flesh

Perhaps it was Gabriel who met the shepherds, but the miracle was the message, not the messenger. He said, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.’ John says, ‘And the Word 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’.

Our suitable substitute

The coming of the Lord Jesus, and the presence of the Lord Jesus in flesh on earth, is at the heart of the gospel message of salvation by grace. By becoming a man the Lord Jesus ably represented men as their suitable Substitute. Being God He was fit to fulfil all righteousness by bearing an infinite weight of judgment in His human soul. The birth of Christ was not good tidings to every individual: Herod and the priests and Pharisees of Jerusalem did not welcome such news then, or ever. But to all for whom Christ came, and all who were given to Him in covenant mercy there is joy in beholding, ‘God with us’.

Something to think about

In tomorrow’s service we shall consider the good news or ‘tidings’ of Christ’s coming, the great joy of Christ’s presence, and the saving hope of Christ’s sacrifice. We shall consider this in the context of the angel’s words, ‘Fear not’, ‘unto you’ and ‘is born a Saviour’ and we shall ask the Lord that we, like Mary the mother of our Lord, might keep all

these things and ponder them in our heart.

Amen

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