

CHRISTMAS AND THE CHRISTIAN LONGING, 1st Peter 1:1-12, Part 2

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Introduction: Like Christmas' expectations, New Year's reflections and resolutions are often well intended but seldom fulfilling.

1st Peter 1:1-12 takes us beyond the secular and cultural expectations about Christmas by unwrapping the gift of the better Christian longing and gives us hope beyond the earth bond New Year's resolutions of doing better [has anyone in their right mind ever hoped for a worse year to come! cf. Colossians 2:23, et al.]...

Note the parallels between the Christmas story and the Christian longing:

* As Mary and Joseph were **pilgrim-sojourners** in this story, ultimately Jesus the only begotten Son of God was a **pilgrim-sojourner** from heaven,

vv. 1-2, so Christian believers are faith **pilgrim-sojourners** in this fallen world yet not homeless...

* As Jesus Christ was born, **begotten**—supernaturally conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit—of the Virgin Mary, His true human nature was **uncorrupted** by the guilt of original sin from Adam—He had no human father,

v. 3, so Christian believers are **begotten again**—born again/from above, i.e. supernatural spiritual rebirth, with a longing for a heavenly home identified as a living hope for an **incorruptible inheritance**...

* There was **no reservation** for Jesus in the comforts, pleasures or passing fashions of this world,

v. 4, so Christian believers have a **perpetual reservation**=a having been kept—place in heaven.

At His birth Jesus was **revealed** to be the Christ for the first time and many times throughout his life, but especially by His resurrection from the dead,

v. 5, Heaven is a gated community of faith for those “who are guarded by the power of God through faith for salvation”...

This salvation is the “apocalyptic eschatology” [GK]=”salvation ready to be **revealed** in the last time”—the end of the Old Covenant and inauguration of the New Covenant is the *final phase* of the God revealed finale!

So Christian believers' longing for a heavenly home is identified as a living hope for an incorruptible inheritance assured by faith in Jesus' resurrection and securely kept by the power of God.

Christmas Story:

The shepherds and angelic hosts **greatly rejoiced** over the revelation of Jesus as the Savior. Yet the angels returned to their world and the shepherds remained shepherds and witnesses of this great wonder of salvation.

In the midst of these great wonders and visitations the **grief** of sin in this fallen world is still present. “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.” (St. Luke 2:34-35)

One of the earthly treasures presented to the Christ Child by the Magi was **gold** fit for a King. But there are treasures greater than gold, of the various and marvelous wonders about the Christmas story we are told, “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (St. Luke 2:19)

The **genuineness of faith** is demonstrated throughout the Christmas story attested by **Divine revelation**.

The shepherds believed the angelic announcement and worshiped the baby Jesus.

Simeon was a just [righteous] and devout man,

“...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, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.’” (St. Luke 2:25-32)

The prophetess Anna, also seeing the baby Jesus in the temple, gave thanks and testified by faith that this baby was the Redeemer.

What is recorded and kept by the Christmas story continues to witness in every generation of God’s **great gift of salvation** of which the **prophets** of old were spell-bound and the **angels of heaven** are in wide-eyed wonder.

Hymn # 218 Angels, from the Realms of Glory

Christian longing:

vv.6-9, The Christian longing is expressed in the midst of trials by a genuine faith in believing and loving Jesus Christ, whom we have not seen, for God’s purposed salvation:

v. 6, “**greatly rejoice...grieved** by various trials”...

v. 7, “**genuineness of your faith...more precious than gold...may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**”

v. 8, “whom having not seen you love...yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...”—this is why the Christian longing is not a vague and dreamy nostalgia...

This verse explains the previous one, (verse 7)—the hidden aspects of genuine faith discovered in the love of Jesus Christ all things that are presently unseen, but most intimately real as communicated by the Holy Spirit, i.e. the benefits of redemption & restoration to God’s fellowship—identified in v. 7 as praise, honor, and glory and elaborated in v. 8 as “rejoicing with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

v. 9, “receiving the end of your faith—salvation of your souls.”=the purposed outcome of believers’ faith is salvation, and this promised salvation is a gift waiting to be unwrapped in the glorious resurrection, cf. 1:3 & 3:21-22.

Hymn # 196 Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

vv. 10-12, The Christian longing is shared by the **angels** who are eagerly peering at the apocalyptic and apostolic gospel made known to and through the **prophets** and fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

vv. 10-11, the **prophets** were spell-bound who inquired and searched carefully what God **revealed**...

v. 12, From all Biblical accounts, the **angels in heaven** are in wide-eyed wonder over Christ’s glories in God’s great plan of salvation.

Hymn # 215 While by the Sheep We Watched at Night

“But what, in conclusion, of Joy? For that, after all, is what the story has mainly been about. To tell you the truth, the subject has lost nearly all interest for me since I became a Christian. I cannot, indeed, complain, like Wordsworth, that the visionary gleam has passed away. I believe (if the thing were at all worth recording) that the old stab, the old bittersweet, has come to me as often and as sharply since my conversion as at any time of my life whatever. But I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts. When we are lost in the woods the sight of a signpost is a great matter. He who first sees it cries, ‘look!’ The whole party gathers round and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles, we shall not stop and stare. They will encourage us and we shall be grateful to the authority that set them up. But we shall not stop and stare, or not much; not on this road, though their pillars are of silver and their lettering of gold.” (C.S. Lewis, Surprised By Joy)

It is my hope that our Christian faith enlivened by the regular means of grace and worship of the Holy Trinity transcends cultural celebrations for the better Christian longing.