

Good News Unlimited

December, 1984

Solo Christo—Sola Scriptura—Sola Fida—Sola Gratia



"I bring you good news of a great joy..."

Luke 2:10

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Good News Unlimited is published each month by Good News Unlimited, Inc., P.O. Box GN, Auburn, CA 95603, USA.

Subscriptions are free upon request.

Good News Unlimited is a non-denominational organization comprising a variety of gospel ministries. This magazine is dedicated to proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. It also seeks to keep subscribers up to date on all aspects of Good News Unlimited's ministries—international radio broadcasts, public seminars and congresses, local preaching appointments, publications, **Good News For Kids** (a monthly section in this magazine), cassette publications, etc.

As a nonprofit religious corporation, Good News Unlimited is supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

The editor welcomes unsolicited manuscripts; however, they cannot be returned. Please send typed, double-spaced manuscripts, of general interest to Christians of all denominations, to: The Editor, **Good News Unlimited**, P.O. Box GN, Auburn, CA 95603, USA.

Canadian office: P.O. Box 3068, Station D, Willowdale, M2R 3G5, Ontario, Canada.

Australian office: P.O. Box 1603, Hornsby-Northgate, NSW 2077, Australia.

South African office: P.O. Box 11096, Universitas 9321, Republic of South Africa.

New Zealand office: P.O. Box 10 154, Christchurch, New Zealand.

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Editorial

Think of all the symbols associated with Christmas Day. There is the symbol of the Christ Child, the manger, the angelic heralds, the star, the wisemen, the shepherds, etc. It would be difficult to find a Christmas card or wrapping that didn't incorporate one or more of these biblical symbols. But do they communicate? Have they become common things, commercialized trappings that no longer convey to us their original biblical meaning? Has a sentimental and romantic piety robbed them of their authentic message?

Too often we mistake the symbol for the reality. Is this one reason why Christmas for so many has become a rather superficial experience? Just recently I overheard one shopper explaining to her friend that she needed to buy five or six extra gifts because last Christmas she was embarrassed when a distant relative unexpectedly delivered a number of gifts to her family. We have all experienced the same embarrassment. But is this what Christmas is all about, a superficial exchange of gifts? It's time we made an effort to discover the reality that lies behind each Christmas symbol and to enter into the real meaning of Christmas.

What did Luke wish to convey by the story of the shepherds visiting the Christ Child in a manger? He obviously thought these details were important for the manger is mentioned three times in his narrative (Lk 2:7, 12, 16). The text specifically says that the child in the manger was a sign for the shepherds (v 12).

Luke's reference to a manger may relate to Isaiah 1:3 where God laments:

An ox knows its owner,
and an ass, its master's manger;
But Israel does not know,
my people has not understood.

(New American Bible)

Is Luke hinting that Israel still doesn't understand? But some despised shepherds do! According to the text the immediate reason why Jesus is placed in a manger is that there was no room for him in the inn (v 7). There certainly would have been room if the leaders of Israel had known their Master's manger. Perhaps that is the reason why the angels went to the shepherds. The lowly herdsmen were outcasts. They did not practice the ceremonial laws and were looked upon as being crude and unorthodox. Perhaps they were the only ones who would believe that the Messiah was born in a manger. Luke has already shown that God has a heart for the poor, the outcasts, the little people. Mary in "The Magnificat" ecstatically proclaims ". . . he (God) has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. . . he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree. . ." (Lk 1:48, 52). Furthermore, Luke's Gospel stresses that Jesus is a Savior for the poor, the despised, and the sinners (5:32; 7:34; 15:1; 19:7).

We shall never exhaust the full meaning of the Christmas symbols. But how richer our experience of Christmas would be if we spent more time contemplating the reality behind the symbols.

—Noel Mason



The Day God Snuck in the Back Door

by Brad McIntyre

God seldom enters our lives through the front door. He usually slips in the back screen door, the one that needs painting. Sometimes we do not even know he is in the house. God is sneaky.

Many people have waited and waited for God at the front door, thinking surely he would ring the doorbell before entering. They have never learned to look for God in the homely nooks and crannies of their own lives. Others are spooked by the thought of God hanging around somewhere but not knowing where exactly, kind of like an invasion of privacy. They prefer God to be more "up front," perhaps to phone ahead to let them know his whereabouts and his estimated time of arrival.

But we should give God more credit. After all, why should he perform the way *we* expect him to? By now he is a master at turning our preconceived opinions of his providence upside down and reversing all our expectations. No, God does not (will not) fit into the boxes we build for him.

The point of all this is that the first step to experiencing God is to admit we do not and cannot fully comprehend his ways. They always remain just out-of-reach of our systematic formula and rational categories of thought. God is slippery. He cannot be reduced to a three-point outline as in Greek rhetoric. Listening to God's voice in your life is not like reading a computer printout. It is more similar to encountering

the evocative imagery of a poem. The cerebral approach alone will not suffice. Until we realize this we are still stationed at the front door waiting for God to make a spectacular, though predictable entrance when actually he is already in the kitchen. (You see, he snuck in the back door, unannounced of course.)

“God is masterful at turning our preconceived opinions of his providence upside down and reversing all our expectations. He does not — will not — fit into the boxes we build for him”

The Sting

One day, a long time ago, God snuck in the back door of human history via a feeding trough. Our twentieth-century reproductions of the Nativity scene (courtesy of Sears) distort what really happened. They are too squeaky clean, too Anglo-Saxon. A manger is not a wooden crib filled with fresh, yellow straw. A manger is a nicked-up stone feeding trough surrounded by dirty animals and dung. The immaculate “Baby Jesus” probably had a camel and an ass for roommates. There is something comical as well as awe-inspiring about that. Talk about a reversal!

I have tried to wrap my mind around Bethlehem but have not succeeded. Laughter once seemed out of place, sacrilegious. Now I laugh when I ponder Bethlehem — a reverent laughter called “praise.” I rejoice because in Bethlehem God surprised the entire universe. He masterminded the greatest “sting” ever.

The Jewish leaders waited at the front door for the Messiah. Secure in their traditions and airtight theology, they never expected a feeding trough. Nearby, however, another reversal was taking place. A group of uneducated shepherds working the nightshift were taking a break when suddenly a host of angels appeared overhead announcing the “good news.” The shepherds learned that while network TV was focused on Jerusalem (always Jerusalem!) the action was really in Bethlehem. We do not know which shepherd stayed behind to mind the sheep, but the rest of the crew hightailed it to Bethlehem as fast as possible. They had heard the back door slam and knew what it meant.

The Question

The question now is this: Does God intentionally pass over the “know-it-alls” to reveal himself to simpletons? Or do the “know-it-alls” intentionally ignore the back door because they are too comfortable and secure in their chairs by the front door?

I can be a “know-it-all” sometimes. As a graduate student in theology, I live with my nose in a book, always learning, always filling my head with knowledge. I am surrounded, protected, and often blinded by my answers. A few months ago, however, God shook me out of my “know-it-allness” in an unforgettable way.

Her eyes said she was the richest person on earth. No one could have convinced her otherwise (or me for that matter). Her radiant face, beaming with the

innocent joy of childhood, woke me from my daydream. Before me stood my fifteen-month-old daughter, Gloria, offering for my inspection the precious “finds” of her afternoon romp through the park: a bruised crab apple and a rusty Lowenbrau bottle cap. You would have thought she had pilfered Fort Knox.

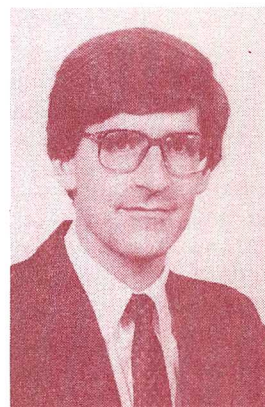
I know God speaks through Scripture, but he caught me offguard when I heard his voice in a crab apple and a bottle cap. At first I did not understand the message but sensed his presence. It was one of those moments when time freezes, concerns are suspended, and the “still small voice” comes out of hiding and is neither still nor small. Gloria stretched out her arms toward me, anxious to share two apparently useless items which meant nothing to the world but everything to her. Then God’s message got through to me, a message of paternal love and concern. In a flash of a second I exploded into spontaneous laughter. Sweeping up Gloria in my arms, we spun around and around, still laughing, joyful dancing partners with the falling leaves of autumn’s maples.

“Beneath the surface of the familiar, the common, the mundane, God waits for us to discover him”

God had snuck in my back door and surprised me with an unexpected revelation. Through Gloria’s two “treasures” he had addressed and undressed me, saying, “Bring your bruised apples to me, my child, your rusty bottle caps too. They mean everything to me because they are everything to you.”

The Back Door

Each year at this time Christians celebrate God’s back-door entrance into human history. Bethlehem is a perpetual reminder that God defies and frustrates our front-door mentality. He freely reveals himself wherever, whenever, and however he wishes. If he chooses to take up residence in a feeding trough, that is his to do and ours to ponder. If he prefers to enter our lives through the back door, then perhaps we should remove the deadbolts of intellectual arrogance, sophistication, and subterfuge. Let us continue to seek him and his answers in creative, imaginative ways, for



Brad McIntyre

our God is marvelously unpredictable and predictably marvelous. Seldom is he where we expect him to be, yet he is never absent. The challenge for us is to see and hear him in the Bethlehems of life, to experience him in the bruised crab apples and rusty bottle caps which we normally pass by. Beneath the surface of the familiar, the common, the mundane, God waits for us to discover him.

There Were Shepherds... Keeping Watch

Luke 2:8

by Desmond Ford

Every aspect of the Bethlehem nativity is a facet of the gospel jewel, a reflection of Christ himself. With every new Christmas we are enabled to behold more and more of his glory as we contemplate the scenes which made angels marvel and bow in adoration.

Bethlehem, the famed city of David, means "the house of bread." As of old, here at Bethlehem the true Bread of Life came down in the stillness of the night. He was anointed with the dew of heaven, for "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him." The ancient manna was white, and prefigured the purity of the Bread which was to come. It was round, reminding us of the perfection of the Messiah, unbroken and unmarred by any defect. It was sweet and nourishing, as our Lord is to the souls of believers.

There was no room at the inn, for the inn pictures the noisy concourse of this world intent on the things of the flesh. But in the resting place of God's humblest creatures there was room for the Son of God. Only clean animals were kept in the manger, those used in sacrificial worship. They pointed to the only Man apart from Eden's Adam who reflected absolute purity and who alone was fit to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Joseph, the husband, tenderly caring for Mary, his spouse, reminds us that Christ is the great "house-band" who cherishes his bride, the church, and girds about the whole family of God by his love, power, and wisdom. Mary's unquestioning surrender to the Holy Spirit, her willingness to endure shame and obloquy prefigured these same characteristics in her son.



"To them it was told that the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of all God's sheep, was born that night to them as to all mankind"



"Unto you is born...in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"

The Shepherds

But have you thought about the shepherds, who on the slopes of the little village were watching their flocks that memorable night? To them it was told that the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of all God's sheep, was born that night to them as to all mankind. "Unto you is born. . . in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11). It was the humble shepherds who heard the heavenly choirs singing joyously of glory and peace, rather than the mighty ones of the capital city Jerusalem.

They had often read David's most famous song — what we call the Shepherd Psalm (Ps 23). They knew David was talking of God who guaranteed that his sheep would not want, and who provided green pastures of nourishment and rest. Often they had echoed David's confidence in the Heavenly Shepherd who led in the paths of righteousness even through the valley of death, and who provided not only the necessities of the table but also the added refreshment of anointing even in the presence of life's enemies.

In the hearts of these simple Judean shepherds was the glorious confidence that the Heavenly Shepherd had bestowed everlasting goodness (righteousness) and mercy for all the days of this life, and as well an everlasting habitation "in the house of the Lord forever." What they did *not* know was the secret of how a just and holy God could deal thus with guilty men and yet maintain his own government and equity. In the fullness of time that secret would be revealed at Bethlehem and Calvary. These hillside shepherds of

Bethlehem also point to Jesus. The One born that night was to declare himself the Good Shepherd who would give his life for the sheep. During his ministry Christ alluded to the prophecy of Zechariah who foretold that One who was God's equal would be smitten. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd. . ." (Zec 13:7). Not only Zechariah but also Ezekiel (ch 34) and Isaiah (ch 40) pictured the coming

"According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said that he was the door to the sheepfold"

Messiah as a good shepherd — one who would seek out his flock which had been scattered and feed and lead them. Isaiah promised that he would "gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Is 40:10,11).

Seven Shepherds

Seven individual shepherds are mentioned in the Bible. These seven shepherds are Abel, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Christ, and "the idol shepherd" of Zechariah 11:16, 17 — a reference to the Antichrist. The other six shepherds are often seen as types of Christ, the Good Shepherd. We learn of the tragic fate of the Messiah Shepherd from Abel who was murdered by his brother. Christ's loving care for the lost sheep is prefigured in the life of Jacob (see Gn 30:31; 31:28-40). The abundance of bread ("enough and to spare" Lk 15:17) is pictured in the life of Joseph who provided for his people through long years of drought (Gn 37:2). It is written of Moses, the fourth shepherd, that he watered, protected and guided the sheep. The book of Hebrews (3:2-6) tells us that the work of Moses and his fidelity prefigured that of Christ. As for David, the fifth individual shepherd presented in the Old Testament, he stands out as a beacon because he gladly risked his life for his sheep (see 1 Sam 17:34-36). But in contrast to David and in even greater contrast to Christ, the idol shepherd ("worthless" RSV) does not care for the perishing or seek the wandering or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but "devours the flesh of the fat ones" and "deserts the flock" (Zec 11:16,17).

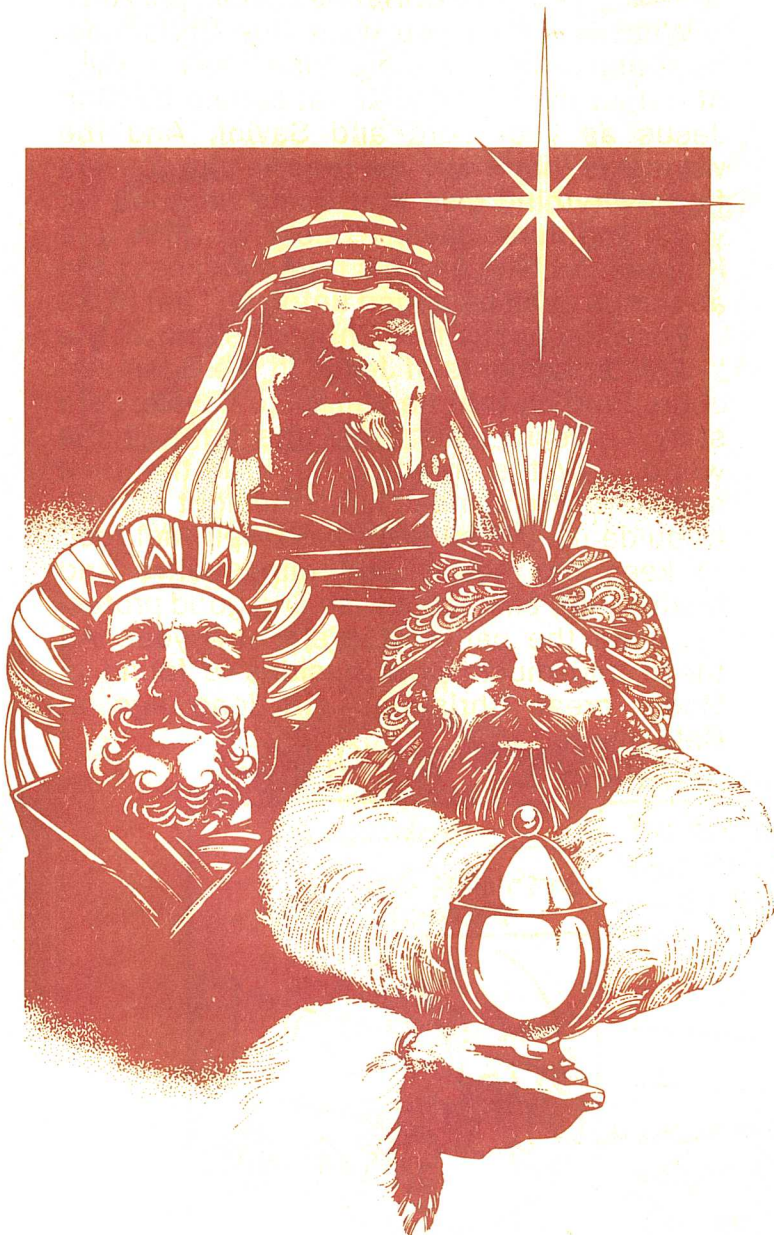
So this Christmastide when you see the shepherds of Bethlehem on your greeting cards or elsewhere remember that they too testify of the One then born who would not only be the sacrificial lamb, but also the Caring Shepherd. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said that he was the door to the sheepfold (Jn 10:7). If anyone enters by that door and nestles in the arms of that Shepherd he will carry him back to the fold of God



Desmond Ford



THE MAGI AND YOU



As we draw near to Christmas time the stories about Bethlehem flood back into memory — especially that one about the wise men who brought their gifts to the royal baby.

There are prophecies in Ps 72; Isa 49:7, 23; 60:16 (you will find it fun to look them up in your own Bible) which the church has always applied to the coming of the Magi. That strange word, by the way, is the Latin form of the original word used in the first copies of Matthew's gospel which is often translated "wise men." Magi was the word usually used for priests and wise men among the Medes, Persians, and Babylonians.

As you can imagine, there have been all sorts of stories about the wise men who came to Bethlehem — stories which go beyond the little that Scripture has to say about them. Perhaps the most popular story is that they were three kings by the names of Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Actually the Bible does not say how many there were, but it is thought there were three because of the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

According to tradition these three kings were meant to remind all men of the Trinity and of the three divisions of the human race which came from the sons of Noah. F.W. Boreham, a great Baptist preacher and writer, has told the best story about them, drawing from the threads of ancient tradition.

According to Boreham the three kings were strikingly different. Gaspar from Tar-

shish was young and tall, and as black as ebony, while Balthazar of Babylon was middle-aged, of average height and olive-skinned. As for the King of Nubia, Melchior by name, he was very old, short, and bent.

The travellers, following the star which was God's special sign, had all sorts of troubles. But by sharing their talents and their love, they found themselves approaching Bethlehem at last. For days they had argued about the nature of the One they were coming to worship. The youngest, Gaspar, expected a powerful king and so his offering was a royal one — gold. But Balthazar longed to see a God in human form, One who could explain the mysteries of life, and not merely a strong ruler who could make good laws. He brought with him incense with which to worship this God when he found him.

But the oldest of the three wise men, Melchior, having often worried over the sins of the past, sought for a Savior — someone who could do something about his guilt. And his gift was the one that symbolized suffering, for he believed that a true savior would have to be a sufferer. Had not someone said that the only being who could attend to men's wounds would have to be one with wounds himself?

Very beautifully Boreham sets forth the climax of the traveller's experience.

"When they saw that the star had but led them to a baby in a women's arms all three were at first overwhelmed with chagrin and dismay. But, as they sat and pondered this strange happening, they heard Mary, after the fashion of mothers, singing to her child. And all three listened.

'My soul doth magnify the Lord!' she sang. 'The Lord!' exclaimed Gaspar. 'Then I have

found my Sovereign, my Monarch, my King, my Lord!' And he offered his gold. But Mary sang on.

'And my spirit hath rejoiced in God. . .' she continued. 'In God!' cried Balthazar, his face lighting up. 'Then I have found Him — the God for whom my spirit hungered!' And he presented his incense to the babe. But not even yet had Mary finished her song.

'My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior!' 'My Savior,' echoed Melchior, 'My Savior!' and he offered his vase of myrrh.

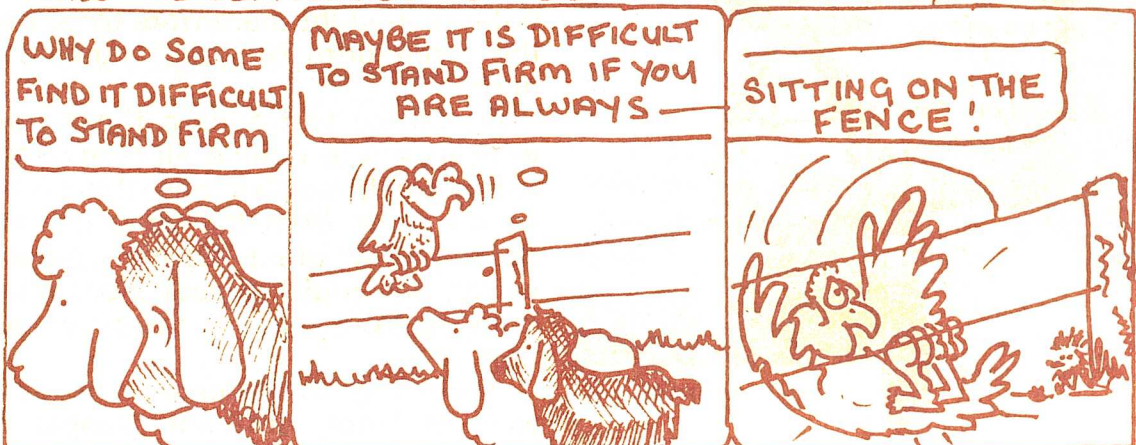
And so Gaspar found in Jesus the King of his desire. And Balthazar found in Jesus the God he had so passionately sought. And Melchior found in Jesus the Savior for whom his very soul was aching."

-My Christmas Book, pp. 78-79

What is it that you want this Christmas, boys and girls? If you are wise, like the Magi of old, at the top of your list should be King Jesus as your Lord and Savior. And the wonder is that when you receive him you will find everything else that could be good for you. Scripture says: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you" (Mt 6:33).

For a fun puzzle this Christmas find all the "I AM" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Find all that he can be to us. Here's a start — Jesus said I AM the light of the world, I AM the bread of life, I AM the good shepherd. We all need light, the light of truth to guide us. We all need food, spiritual food to keep our hearts and minds alive and healthy. We all need a wise and good protector amid the perils of every new year. All these and much more besides is found in God's great Christmas gift long ago at Bethlehem.

THE ADVENTURES OF BENJAMIN — By Bcm.



Coloring Fun



Look up Revelation 21:18-21 where it tells you about the beautiful wall surrounding the city. It was decorated with twelve precious stones. Here they are —

STONE

1. Jasper
2. Sapphire
3. Chalcedony (Agate)
4. Emerald
5. Sardonyx
6. Carnelian
7. Chrysolite
8. Beryl
9. Topaz
10. Chrysoprase
11. Jacinth
12. Amethyst

COLOR

- Red Brown
- Blue
- White and Brown
- Green
- Milky white and dark red mixture
- Bright red
- Golden Yellow
- Black, sea-green, or yellow
- Yellow-green
- Apple green
- Orange
- Purple

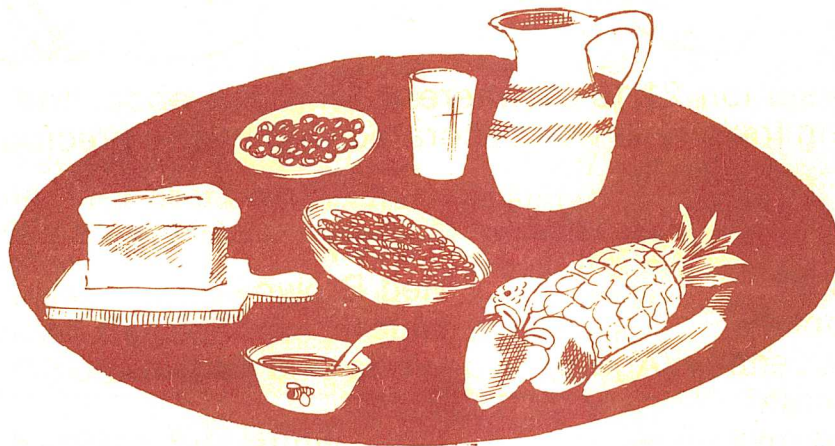
Color in the pattern using only the colored stones mentioned above. Take care with each part and you will be proud of your finished pattern!



Merry Christmas, Children, to one and all!!

Moses is coming to Christmas Dinner — what can you give him that you know he'll be used to? Unscramble the words to find out what's on the table.

- RDEBA _____
- ANBES _____
- LMKI _____
- EYHNO _____
- TUSN _____
- ISOLVE _____
- UTFIR _____



Answers — DON'T PEEK!

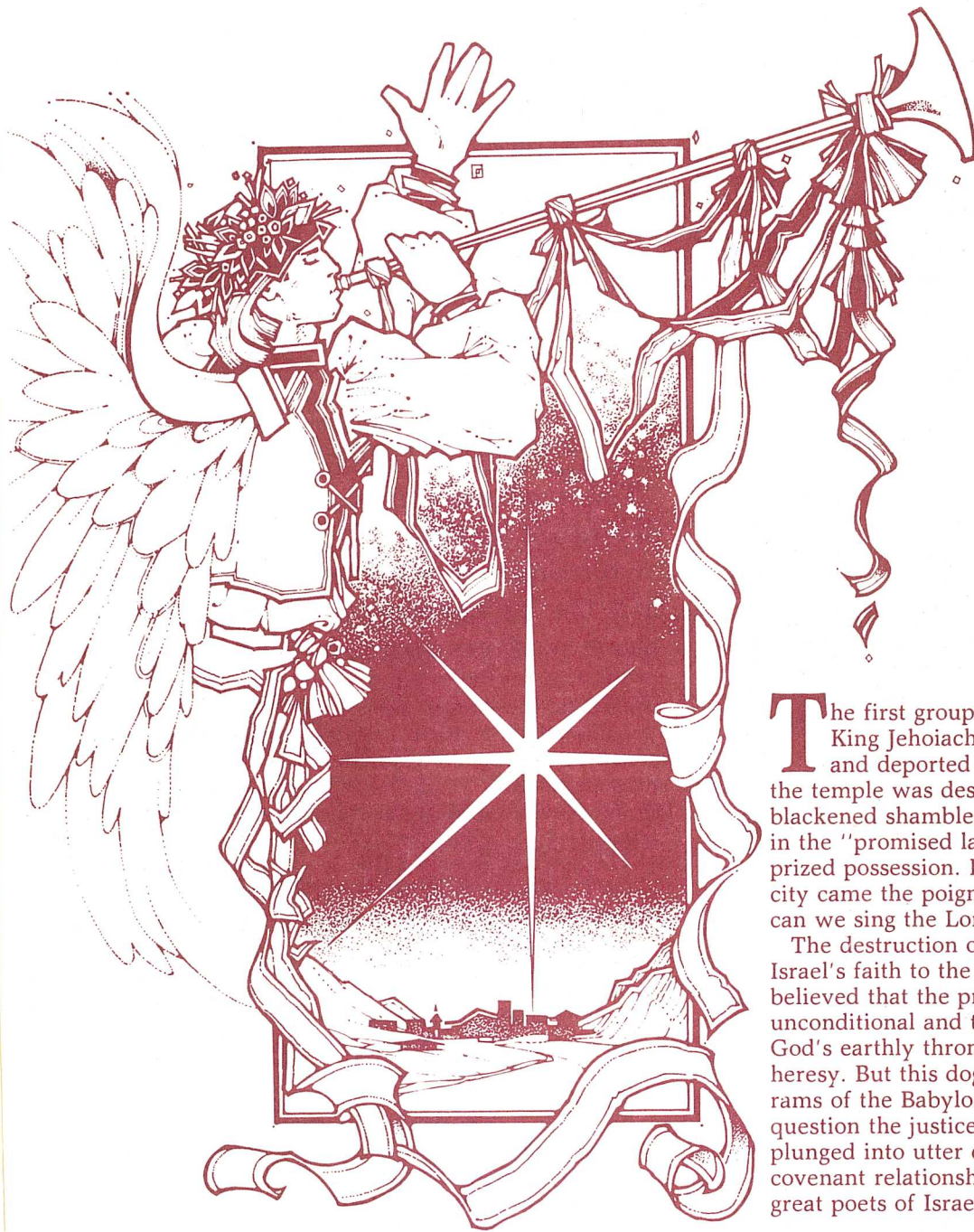
Good New for Kids is dedicated to promoting the message and spirit of the gospel for children. It is published by Good News Unlimited, P.O. Box GN, Auburn, CA 95603, as a supplement to its monthly general publication, **Good News Unlimited**.

Subscriptions are free on request.

Editor: Gillian Ford

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Honey	Bread
Milk	Beans
Fruit	Olives
Nuts	



by Noel Mason

The first group of Hebrews, including the young King Jehoiachin, were uprooted from Palestine and deported to Babylon in 597 B.C. Eventually the temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was left in a blackened shambles. Babylonian troops were stationed in the "promised land." Israel was robbed of her prized possession. From within the heart of a strange city came the poignant cry of the lonely exiles, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

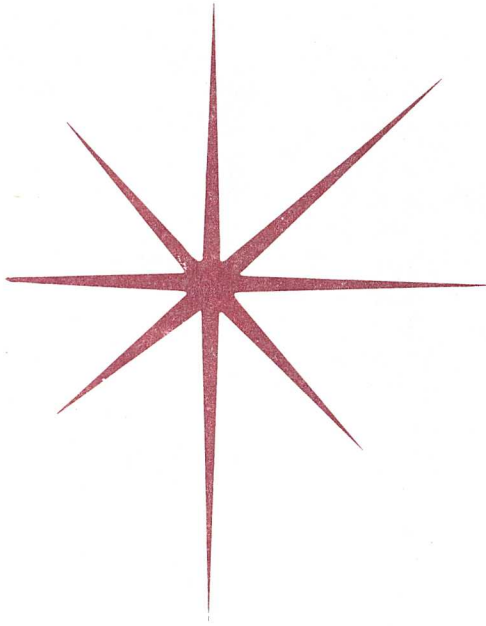
The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile tested Israel's faith to the utmost. Many Israelites had believed that the promises given to David were unconditional and that Jerusalem would always be God's earthly throne. Anything else was considered heresy. But this dogma never survived the battering rams of the Babylonians. Many Israelites began to question the justice of God (Ez 18:2,25). Some were plunged into utter despair believing that their broken covenant relationship was irreparable (Is 63:19). The great poets of Israel broke forth in plaintive cries:

We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is none among us who knows how long.
How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile thy name for ever?
Why dost thou hold back thy hand,
why dost thou keep thy right hand in thy
bosom? (Ps 74:9, 10)

JESUS: Messenger of Joy

An Explanation and a New Promise

But not all yielded to discouragement. The national calamity of 587 B.C. was to prove the surprising tenacity and vitality of Israel's faith. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah provided an adequate theological explanation for the national disaster. In fact, even before the disaster occurred, they were warning Israel to beware of the snare of the false prophets. These three



prophets gave the tragedy a coherent explanation. They persuaded Israel to see the tragedy not as a contradiction, but as a vindication of her historic faith. They kept alive a spark of hope. They encouraged the exiles to see the calamity as a purification preparing them for a bright new future.

The work of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah was complemented by another unknown prophet. His prophecies are found in the latter chapters of the book of Isaiah. He is often referred to as the Second Isaiah. No other prophet in the Old Testament has as clear a conception of Israel's God as Second Isaiah (40:12, 26). He looked upon the pagan gods with great disdain, calling them lumps of wood and metal (40:19f; 46:5-7). He believed that God had control of history and was about to lead Israel in a new exodus to the promised land. He believed that Cyrus was an unwitting tool in the hand of Yahweh (44:24-45:7). He emphasized that God was about to do a "new thing" (42:9; 43:19; 48:3,6-8). There would be a new turning point in the history of Israel. Utilizing the powerful, poetic imagery of the Exodus he painted a picture of the

"Many Israelites had believed that the promises given to David were unconditional and that Jerusalem would always be God's earthly throne"

desert becoming a garden of flowers and flowing with crystal water (40:3-5; 41:18f; 42:16; 49:9-11).

This unknown prophet saw his task as comforting and lifting up the spirits of the exiles who were facing difficult questions of faith. He portrayed God as a great comforter. "Comfort, comfort my people says your God" (Is 40:1). In a wonderful vision this prophet saw that the exile was soon to end and that a new period of salvation was about to begin. He foresaw the procession of the liberated ones already miraculously marching through the desert (Is 49:8-11, 13; 55:12).

Prophet of Joy

More than anything else this prophet was a prophet of the joy of salvation. In an exciting prophetic vision he saw a joyful messenger preceding the returning exiles. The watchmen on the towers of Jerusalem see this messenger of joy on the mountains and break out in jubilation:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people he has redeemed Jerusalem (Is 52:7-9).

"The real source of the disciples' joy must not be the consciousness of having great powers of authority but the awareness that their names were written down in heaven"

In Second Isaiah, the "messenger of good news," is a specific religious title for the Messenger of God, who announces the reign of God, and the new age of salvation and joy. Notice the descriptive role of this last-day Messenger of joy and good news in Isaiah 61:1-3:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and opening the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. (Is 61:1-3)

According to this prophet God was about to create a new heaven and new earth and Jerusalem would become a city of joy and gladness.

But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. (Is 65:18,19)

The words joy and gladness occur six times in verses 18-19, and they become the names of the city. What an inspiring poem of promise!

Jesus: Messenger of Joy

The promises of Second Isaiah were never fulfilled. At least they were never *filled full*. We all know the disappointing history of Israel after the Exile. The religion of Israel became a religion of law, a religion of sackcloth and ashes. But the vision of Second Isaiah was not lost. Centuries later, in the days of Caesar

Augustus, an angel of the Lord appeared to some poor shepherds in the hills of Palestine and said:

... Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you *good news of a great joy* which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

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 among men with whom he is pleased! (Lk 2:10-14)

Good news of a great joy! Once more the Isaian eschatological cry of joy breaks forth. Jesus was a messenger of joy. He ushered in the reign of God, the age of salvation. The Gospels echo with the sounds of jubilation. Hardly had this new Messenger of joy begun his ministry when he was approached by some with a question of bewilderment: "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Mk 2:18-19). According to Jesus it was not a time for tears, for fasting, or for sackcloth and ashes. It was a time for festivity and joy. Jesus would rather feast with the common people than fast with the devout.

"From the birth of Jesus to the prison cell of Paul to the jubilant hymns of the book of Revelation, the New Testament resounds with the echoes of shouts of joy."

It is clear that Jesus saw himself fulfilling the role of Second Isaiah's messenger of joy, for his reply to John's disciples is a combination of free quotations from Isaiah 35:5ff; 29:18-19 and 61:1-2. Note what he said in response to their question:

And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

And blessed is he who takes no offense at me. (Lk 7:22, 23)

The promise of Second Isaiah has found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

A Misguided Piety

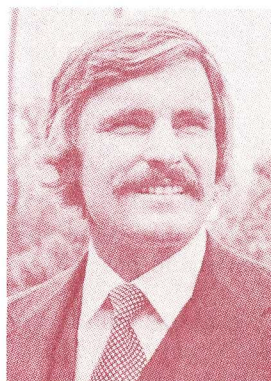
It is certainly a misguided piety that forgets how to be joyful. From the birth of Jesus to the prison cell of Paul to the jubilant hymns of the book of Revelation, the New Testament resounds with the echoes of shouts of joy. Dourness is not a mark of godliness. If the Psalmist could cry "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" then how much more we who live in the time of great salvation. It is recorded that Solomon sent his people away from a great assembly, "joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord has shown to David and to Israel" (2 Chr 7:10).

Isn't this the task of God's ministers today? Are we not recipients of the goodness of the Lord?

Millions today are desperately searching for happiness and joy. Many try to experience it by swallowing pills — stimulants and relaxers. Many Christians, too, long to experience more of the gift of joy. As Christians we need to remember that joy is a byproduct. It is the result of something else. It cannot be experienced outside of a right relationship with God. Jesus made this connection clear when he said to the paralytic "Be of good cheer your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:21). Joy is the byproduct of the forgiveness of sins. Joy is a byproduct of the gospel. On one occasion Jesus sent seventy missionaries ahead of him into the surrounding towns and villages. According to Luke they returned saying: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but *rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven*" (Lk 10:17-20). The seventy were ecstatic about the success of their mission and the power of their authority. But Jesus could see that there was a peril in this kind of rejoicing; it can so easily pass into self-congratulation and presumptuousness. The real source of the disciples' joy must not be the consciousness of having great powers of authority, but the awareness that their names were written down in heaven.

One night the disciples of Jesus were caught in a fierce windstorm on the sea of Galilee. Their boat was about to sink. They became terrified by what appeared to be a ghost. They knew it was Jesus when they heard the words: "Be of *good cheer*; it is I; be not afraid" (Mt 14:27). Christian joy, the cheerful heart is a byproduct of trust. The reason why so many Christians experience so little of Christian joy is that their faith is too quickly overcome by fear in the storms of life. Little faith means little joy.

Not so long ago I visited an elderly friend of mine who had become quite cynical about life. He knew he would never come out of the hospital alive. In a mood of depression he said to me, "Ah well, this old world won't be too difficult to leave behind." But as Christians, we need not yield to such despair. We must say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight of faith, henceforth. . ." The gospel gives us reasons to joy even in suffering and sorrow (2 Cor 6:10).



Noel Mason

The Joy of Christmas

Soon it will be Christmas, 1984. In spite of all our worries, we are all hoping for a happy, joyous time. But, let us remember the experience of Christmas joy can only be ours as we stop worrying about what the world is coming to, and rejoice in what has come to the world — good tidings of a great joy, from Jesus, the Messenger of joy.

Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed

Reviewed by Brad McIntyre

Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, Philip Hallie, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1979, 303 pages.

This book is a story about a small village in the mountains of southern France which became a "city of refuge" for Jews fleeing from the Nazis during World War II, "lest innocent blood be shed" (Dt 19:7-10). It is a story of both individual and corporate commitment; a story of how an entire group of people took action to rescue other human beings destined for slaughter. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* describes a village which transcended self-interest and put its life on-the-line for terror-stricken strangers who had no leverage except their common humanity.

Philip Hallie is a professor of ethics who has devoted much of his professional career to the study of human cruelty. Being a Jew, he has a special interest in the history of anti-Semitism. While reading an anthology of documents from the Holocaust, he came across a short article about a French village named Le Chambon. The story shocked him to tears, not because of its horrors, but because of its goodness. He resolved at that moment to seek out the full story of Le Chambon in order to understand how and why goodness happened there. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* is the inspiring result of his research.

The main character of the book is Pastor Andre Trocme, the spiritual leader of Le Chambon. Trocme described himself as a "violent man conquered by God." Hallie traces Trocme's development as a young pastor, his early years of ministry, his arrival in Le Chambon, and his subsequent influence over the villagers during the Nazi Occupation. Trocme was a devoted pastor of the common people, a real down-to-earth minister who drew near to his flock by visiting them regularly in their homes. He was also an outspoken advocate of nonviolent resistance — something which brought him worldwide fame, especially after the war. His French Huguenot background (Reformed Protestant) gave Trocme an independent spirit which did not readily submit to authoritarian regimes. Resisting abusive authorities was second nature to a Huguenot, thus Trocme openly resisted the Nazis from the very beginning. But he would not resort to violence. Today we would call him a "vocational pacifist." To Trocme, Jesus' teaching regarding nonretaliation was to be obeyed literally. Yet it was not enough to refrain from doing harm. One must also seek to prevent harm from being done to others. With these two convictions Trocme led the village of Le Chambon into a conscious, intentional ministry of care to Jewish refugees.

From the pulpit and in the homes of his parishioners Trocme taught his views on nonviolence and positive action in resisting evil. He was supported in his work by his courageous and loving wife, Magda. Hallie does an excellent job describing the characters of the Trocmes, revealing the inner workings of their home life: its pressures, tension, and joy. Trocme was also

assisted in his efforts by his associate, Edouard Theis, and another local friend, Roger Darcissac, who is now the official historian of Le Chambon. As the story unfolds we see the rare phenomenon of corporate discipleship develop. Le Chambon becomes a network of care with quite a sophisticated yet secret organization for transporting Jews out of France to Switzerland.

Just how did this network of care operate? Besides Trocme himself, there was a group of people called the "responsables." Originally they were leaders of youth Bible study groups which Trocme had organized before the war. The groups met every other week for intimate study while the group leaders met with Trocme for guidance on the off weeks. During the Nazi Occupation these groups and their leaders continued to meet, only now they discussed other things besides the Bible! The "responsables" became one primary means of communication regarding the Jewish refugees. Each group was an independent unit and shared its information only with Trocme. In this way, if one leader was caught, he had no concrete information to give concerning other clandestine activities in the village. Refugees would arrive by train. Because Le Chambon was located in a mountain area, it was fairly well-isolated and was surrounded by forests. This made it somewhat ideal for hiding the refugees, who were housed with local people or on nearby farms until they could be led to Switzerland. The village made false identification cards for the refugees and even had a secret informant working in the regional government headquarters who would warn the villagers by phone that a Nazi "roundup" was being planned. At times like these, the Jews in hiding were whisked off to the surrounding forest until the Nazis were gone.

There are plenty of tense moments in the story, like when the Gestapo nearly capture Trocme in Lyons, or when the Nazis conduct a surprise roundup during the Sunday morning service. There are also tragic moments, such as the death of Trocme's beloved son, Jean-Pierre, or the deportation of Daniel Trocme (Andre's second cousin) and the Jewish children he had been sheltering, to Poland, where they are all exterminated.

Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed is a rare and unforgettable book of universal appeal. For Christians it is a gripping story of discipleship which challenges one's own ideas of what it means to live for Christ. Often a Christian is tempted to view discipleship in terms of personal piety alone without serious reference to the acute social ills of the day. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* is a reminder that discipleship, while not excluding personal piety, extends also to our neighbor and encompasses social action and reform. The book left in me the haunting question, "What does my faith look like in the eyes of the oppressed among us?" This is ultimately the question of true discipleship.

Odds and Ends

Australian Seminars.

Dr. Desmond Ford, well loved preacher, scholar and author, will conduct seminars in Australia and New Zealand in February 1985. He will be accompanied at east coast cities of Australia, by Ron Allen – Australian Director for GNU.

Dr. Ford's Itinerary is as follows:

- * Brisbane – Feb. 8, 9, 10
- * Gold Coast – Feb. 10
- * Melbourne – Feb. 15, 16
- * Perth – Feb. 17
- * Adelaide – Feb. 18
- * Toronto, N.S.W. – Feb. 20
- * Sydney – Feb. 22, 23
- * Christchurch – Feb. 24, 25
- * Auckland – Feb. 26, 27

The Seminar theme will be, "Your Gethsemane and Mine" – The Christian approach to tragedy.

Watch your letterbox and city newspaper for more details.

Donations

We gratefully acknowledge receipt of these donations.

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\$69.00
\$10.00
\$220.00
\$250.00
\$99.00

Correct Address.

Although GNU has operated out of its office in Hornsby N.S.W. for almost a year now, some of our friends have not made the mental switch from the former address in Victoria. Here is our correct address once more.

P.O. Box 1603
Hornsby, Northgate
N.S.W. 2077

Questions and Answers

Q. Could you tell me in simple terms how to become a Christian and how to preserve the new life in Christ?

A. The old hymn "Trust and Obey" perhaps says it best, but be sure you observe the order. Most of us have tried to obey first and failed miserably. Christ saves us as sinners, not as reformed achievers. God is already seeking you and working upon your heart or you could never ask such a question. He always does the initiating, and as you submit and respond, he cares for the rest as well.

The first thing God does is to shed new light upon the mind and heart. Light was first in the old creation (Gn 1:3). It is likewise first in the new creation. He reveals the attractions of Christ and makes manifest the real nature of our idols and follies. Remember no one ever loves Christ until convinced that Christ loves him, and therefore the seeker for the new life must meditate on the story of the cross and its meaning. Use a Bible version that "finds" you. In finding Christ we simultaneously find God and eternal life (Jn 17:3; 5:24; 3:16).

A formula easy to remember is the following: Admit, submit, commit, and transmit. Admit the truth about yourself. It's not flattering, but it is healing. Admit the truth about Christ and the gospel – the glorious news that Christ gives us his righteousness in exchange for our sins. Submit: a definite surrender to the known will of God. Commit: that is, trust him with everything – your past, your present, and your future.

All you are or ever hope to be must be handed over to him for safekeeping. Transmit: pass it on. You remain spiritually alive by communicating that which has saved you. Never be ashamed of Christ, and he will never be ashamed of you. You can never perish while trusting in his merits, but neither can you hoard up all the goodies – pass them on by precept and example. Make it more of the latter than the former, but never without the former for it is by the mouth that confession is made unto salvation (Rom 10:9).

—Desmond Ford

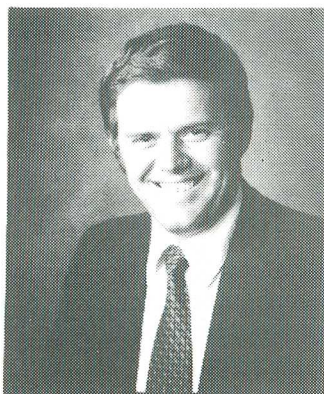
Q. Does it really matter how Jesus died? Surely the main thing to remember is that his death is a demonstration of God's love.

A. The Christian evangelists certainly understood the cross to be a disclosure of God's love for sinners (Rom 5:8). The physical aspects, the form of Jesus' death is, however, vitally important to the theology of salvation. Writing to the proud, boasting Greeks, Paul said that God deliberately chose the foolish, base, despised and contemptible things to confound the wise. He did this in order "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor 1:29-31). Thus the New Testament theology of salvation grows out of the contemptible form of Jesus' death – the cross. Because of our proud sinful natures, the way of salvation has to be via Jesus' cross.

—Noel Mason

GOOD NEWS UNLIMITED WISHES YOU A

Merry Christmas



It is the time of year when the industrialized western world, readies itself for its annual splurge of consumerism. As I write, I am aware that the Christmas decorations have already been hung in department stores and the jolly fellow in red has begun his remarkably busy schedule of pre-yuletide appointments.

At the house where I live the parents are besieged with Christmas suggestions and gift ideas to be considered for the siblings. ET puppets, Barbie Dolls along with computer games and sundry other merchandise have been proposed.

On Christmas morning, all across this fortunate land of ours, living rooms will be littered with bright paper and strewn with perishables. It will be a time of laughter and joy. But sadly, most Christmas gifts will not be able to sustain the gladness. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could give something to someone which would bring them everlasting joy? Such a gift, Christians do have, for

the giving. This gift is Jesus. God's gift to the world. The best gift ever. Christians can give so that their friends remain excited about what they have received for as long as they live.

The world, at Christmas 84, remains a troubled place. People all around find life grim and unrewarding. What the world needs is Jesus. Has He brought peace and hope to your life? Have you been blessed by Him in the year just passed? Do you see yourself as a recipient of great riches under his grace? If so, can we suggest that you consider expending some of this Christmas spirit by sending a donation to GNU? We readily acknowledge that we are but one ministry among many, proclaiming the good news. But this does not stop us from asking you to help us do our part in bringing tidings of great joy to many more people.

To those who have already helped us this year, we want to say, "Thank You". Because of your interest in GNU and your high level of commitment we have been able to sustain and begin to grow a useful Christian agency. With the help of more of our friends we hope to do more in the year to come.

To you we give our warmest love this Christmas season.

Ron Allen



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