

The Savior of the World Luke 2:1-20

The stories in Matthew and Luke paint a simple, touching picture of the birth of Jesus. I personally don't think that we are to interpret them as a literal description of what happened. They are much too poetic and beautiful to be taken literally. Both Matthew and Luke have something dramatic to present, and they use the language of art. At Christmastime we move beyond the critical approach to study and simply listen and watch. What happened then and what happens now?

When I ask a Bible study group to tell the Christmas story, I find that almost everyone will merge the two accounts. We all know them by heart. We recall the angelic appearances to Joseph and Mary, the trek to Bethlehem, the birth in the stable, the visit of the shepherds, and the adoration of the wise men. At times one part of the story stands out more than others. We delight in the telling and the retelling. I never tire of describing the scene or listening to a description.

However, there is for me one point where I must stop or, at least, pause. In Luke's version it is said that an angel appeared to shepherds on the hillside outside Bethlehem and announced, "Do not be afraid; I bring you good news, news of a great joy for the whole nation. Today there has been born to you in the city of David a Savior—Christ the Lord."

A Savior! We have come to say as Christians that Jesus is our Savior; even that Jesus is the Savior of the world. My mind and heart lock on that phrase each time I read or relate the story of the birth of Jesus. It takes a moment to pick up the events after that. I don't know what the angelic appearance must have been like. But the expression will never fade. Jesus is the Savior of the world!

This is the beauty of Christmas. We celebrate the salvation of all persons and the whole world. But something holds us back. We are so fearful that we cannot fully believe the gospel; we are so self-centered that we trust ourselves rather than

God; we are so bent on doing our way that we qualify the announcements of scripture and the wonder of the good news. We start adding conditions.

A pastor leading a confirmation class asked his young pupils, "What is religion?" A little boy immediately replied, "Religion shows us the things we must not do." Unfortunately, this little boy was right. We take glad announcements and add conditions. The Gospel says that Jesus is the Savior of the world; religion says that Jesus is the Savior of the world only if certain conditions of belief and behavior are met. The gospel says, "As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive"; religion says, "All in Adam died, but you'd better listen to us if you want to be made alive."

I have always been bothered by that. For many years I tried to believe the so-called right things and make the so-called right statements. Thank God for the Bible and for the gospel. And for Jesus! In my concentration on the Bible, on the gospel, and on Jesus I have arrived at a relationship with Christ and an understanding of salvation that give me the peace I have always wanted.

My theology might not be for everyone. Indeed, it shouldn't, for we are all different. The Holy Spirit guides you in the same way that this blessed wisdom and presence of God guides me. But here is my discovery. The angels were right! Jesus the Christ is the Savior of the world!

For me the Bible radiates this truth. According to John, "God so loved the world that he gave his son..." (3:16); Jesus said, "I did not come to judge the world, but to save it" (Jn. 12:47); Paul wrote, "The universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21); one of Paul's followers wrote, "I tis God's will that all should find salvation and come to know the truth" and that God gave himself in Christ "to win freedom for all mankind" (I Tim.2:4-6). And what about that amazing expression in Romans 8: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither

height nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 38-39).

Jesus is the Savior of the world! It is my conviction that all persons, indeed all creation will ultimately experience the salvation that God has brought in Jesus the Christ.

This view, for me, has sound theological bases as well as scriptural. The hope of universal redemption lies in the fact that salvation is God’s work, not ours. Salvation is the gift of grace given generously to all, even to the poorest and seemingly least deserving.

Dorothy Day was a pioneer in social ministries. She spent many years in the slums of New York. She founded the Catholic Worker Movement. The editor of the movement’s publication told an interesting story. One day a woman came in and donated a ring to the organization. Everyone admired the ring and wondered what Dorothy would do with it. She could have taken it to the diamond exchange and sold it to pay for food and shelter for needy families. Dorothy gave the ring to an old woman who came in for meals. When someone protested, she said it would bless the old woman’s life, and then asked, “Do you suppose God created diamonds only for the rich?”

Do you suppose God created salvation only for a few? I do not. I see no limits on the grace of God. His grace is not hampered by our ignorance or inaction. God’s love is so great it will not be deterred even by our unbelief.

Also, I believe in universal redemption, because God’s love will not be defeated. I believe in one God who goes by many names. I believe in one reality and in one eternal unity. That unity is love. One day only one thing will be, and that one thing will be love. God is love, and God includes all God has made.

What this view of ultimate salvation of all persons and all things does for me is indescribable. How wonderful to know that in the salvation of the Christ every

wrong will be made right, every hurt healed, every fear removed, every barrier overcome, every relationship restored, every yearning brought to fulfillment.

All those things I think about when I consider the name Jesus and the term Savior. Remember the name. It has crucial importance.

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