

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 21, 2008

## The Mission of Christmas

by Dan Trygg

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only son of a father, full of grace and truth. ...For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Jn. 1:14,17

" You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. ...Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." II Cor. 3:2-9; 5:18,19

**The main purpose for Jesus' coming was reconciliation.** The story of the baby born in a stable, and humbly laid in a feeding trough, was not meant to be a warm-fuzzy tale of nostalgia. It was the introduction of **God's plan to take over the world, ...not by force, but by love.** There was nothing outwardly threatening about that child in the innkeeper's stable, but He was to turn the foundations of the world system upside down, and humanity would never be the same again.

It is interesting that both of these passages listed above compare the Old Covenant with that of the New Covenant introduced by the Child from David's city. The representative of each covenant had something to bring to humankind.

**The Law came through Moses.** It was primarily a covenant between Israel and Yahweh, the Creator. **While it specifically applied to Israel, it was an objective source of revelation concerning who this God is,** what He is like, what is valuable to Him, what He expects from people, and what was required of those who wished to be in a covenant relationship with Him. **The Hebrew name for this law code was the *Torah*, meaning the "Instruction".** In its context, **it was instruction from God for those who wished to be under His care and protection to learn to live in ways that would be pleasing to their King.** If they were to continue to enjoy His watch-care and blessing, and continue to live in the land He provided for them as an inheritance, they would have to adjust their lifestyles to His requirements and preferences. While this was the immediate, and parochial, focus of the Law, God also had much more expansive designs. **From the beginning of His relationship with Abraham, the ancestor of Israel, God had promised that through him, i.e., through his "seed", all the families of the earth would be blessed. The giving of the Law through Moses was a step further in the Divine strategy to bring this promise to pass.** By bringing to birth a nation of more than two million people from the offspring of this "wandering Aramean", God was beginning His "expansion project". He was beginning to accumulate and store up a record of His actions, His instructions and His promises for the future, so that He could prepare a larger, established group of people, not just scattered pilgrims, for the coming of His next major step toward world reconciliation, the coming of the God-man.

**What was the "glory" of the Old Covenant?** We read of it in Exodus 34:29-35. In the context, Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to get the two tablets of the covenant from God. He was gone for 40 days. While there, the people had become impatient and had cast an idol to worship in God's place, in direct violation of the second commandment spoken to them by God from the mountain (Ex. 19,20). Moses had discovered their faithlessness, and in his rage, had thrown down the original tablets at the foot of the mountain. After order had been restored, Moses went back up the mountain for another 40 days, to receive another set of tablets inscribed with the ten basic commandments from God. **While on Mount Sinai, the glory of God was revealed to Moses, so that, when he finally came down and addressed the people, his face was luminous with the radiance of God's glory that had shown upon Him. It had the effect of getting the peoples' attention and respect, for they knew that Moses must have been with God.** As he was away from God, however, the radiance began to fade, so Moses would cover his face with a veil, after speaking with the people, so that they would not see the fading away of the glory from his face. From that time on, whenever he would have a revelation from God to deliver to the people, he would go out to the tent of

meeting and remove the veil from his face. As he spoke with God, his face would be "recharged", in that it would become brightly luminous again, and Moses would speak out the message from God to the people while in this state, so that they would not doubt the source of his words. **The glory was an outward radiance that gave credibility to the messenger, and drew attention to the message.**

**What of the glory of the New Covenant?** Jesus was not to be known by His outward appearance (Isa. 53:2). Except for the incident on the mountain with Peter, James and John (Mk. 9:1-13; II Pet. 1:16,17), He did not impress anyone by any luminescent glow. The glory that He came to display was not to be like that. Nevertheless, Paul refers to it as a greater glory, using comparatives such as "even more", "much more", "abounding", and "surpassing" to describe how it goes farther beyond that outward glory of the Old Covenant. Well, if it did not consist of a luminescent glow, what was the glory that Jesus displayed? According to John 1:14, the glory displayed in Jesus was grace and truth. How are we to make sense of this? Just as the radiation that emanates from the sun is comprised of much more than the small portion that we can process with our eyes (e.g., ultraviolet, infrared, heat energy, etc.), in a similar way, the nature and character of God is much more than the "unapproachable light that no man has seen or can see" (I Tim. 6:16), or the "afterglow" of Moses' experience (Ex. 33:23). John used a word picture to help us understand this. He said that Jesus' glory was "like an only son of a father", meaning that if you get to know that only son, you will learn a great deal about the father and family that raised him. There are manners, character qualities, and world view carried by the son that are the "radiance" of what happened in the father's house as that boy grew up. He has become the embodiment of his father's household. In a similar way, **the "glory" of Jesus was not a physically luminescent glow. What shone from His life was the grace and truth of His Father's heart and character. How was it seen? Through the words and deeds that came from Jesus' life.** They stood out strongly from the surrounding darkness, so that people noticed and were curious as to what was going on. **The glory was an outward display that gave credibility to the Messenger, and drew attention to His message.** The message communicated by His words and actions was that God loves people, and has provided a way of reconciliation by which we can come to truly know Him. Furthermore, God loves people and He wants to set them free from the bondage and oppression of this world.

**Jesus was the promised "seed" of Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth can find blessing. It was not God's intent that we be passive recipients of blessing, but active blessing-givers. Joy, power and vitality come to those who give blessing to others.** This principle was expressed in the Old Testament, the underpinnings of the blessing of God in Israel being founded on this same principle, e.g., "Is this not the fast that I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry and He will say, 'Here I am'. If you will remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom will become like midday, and the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a spring of water that fails not..." (Isa. 58:6-11). Paul's message in II Corinthians was that **we have now been equipped to be servants (practical, hands-on household helpers) of the New Covenant.** We can now do as Jesus did, by reaching out to those the world despises, to set free those under bondage and oppression, to give good news to those without hope, and to heal the hurting and broken. **Sometimes this happens in a powerful, miraculous display of Kingdom power, as evidenced in Jesus' miracles and the Transfiguration, and sometimes it happens through very practical, hands-on, walking-it-out service,** such as the early church practiced by sharing their goods and opening their homes and hearts to one another, crossing ethnic, gender and class barriers to express the love of Christ. **This kind of ministry (domestic service) stood out just as brightly in the world of darkness of that time and culture. It gave credibility to the messengers and drew attention to the message of Good News that they brought.**

**We must always remember that the birth of Jesus is part of a larger mission, a mission of which we are also to be workers. God has entrusted to us this service of reconciliation, and we must do whatever we can to display His glory in ways that will win us credibility and draw attention to the message we have been given.**