

# Worship Notes

Volume 3, Number 12    🎵    December 2008

## THEME: Christmas in Context

### Christmas in Unexpected Places

Isaiah 7:14, 9:2,5-6; Matthew 1; Luke 1–2—we rightly turn to these beloved passages at Christmas time, as we tell once again the incredible story of God reaching into human history and experience in the Person of His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Yet their familiarity is not without its risks. I have heard preachers bemoan the necessity of trying to say anything new about these passages as they face yet another December of Christmas messages. (It might help to take a look at Kenneth Bailey’s fascinating treatment of Luke 2, drawing fresh yet biblically grounded insights from his knowledge of Middle Eastern culture and traditions in his study “The Manger and the Inn;” two versions can be found online [here](#) and [here](#).)

Yet there are other passages in the New Testament that speak profoundly to the meaning of this pivotal event in human history and which can provide rich food for thought, reflection and celebration in our Christmas services. Here are a few of these.

#### **Philippians 2:3-11**

*“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not*

*count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

“The  
Theology  
of  
Christmas”:  
the way  
up is  
down

This passage is the one most commonly pointed to, outside of the gospels, in Christmas meditations. And for good reason Kenneth Kantzer wrote that this passage laid out for us “The Theology of Christmas”—that “the way up is down,” as exemplified by our Lord’s self-emptying and self-humbling, for which cause He was then “highly exalted” by His Father. Paul holds this up as our pattern in relating to one another, that we as Jesus should “consider one another

more important than ourselves” (v. 3). Mary’s “Magnificat” in Luke 1:46-55 similarly relates how in God’s economy “the humble are exalted and, the exalted are humbled.” See *Worship Notes* 2.12 (December 2007).

#### **Hebrews 2:9, 14-17**

*“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. . . . Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise*

*partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*

The writer declares the absolute necessity of the Incarnation: Jesus “*had to be made like his brothers in every respect*” so that He could be an acceptable substitutionary sacrifice for His people. He had to take on “flesh and blood,” so that He could die and through His death provide redemption and freedom from the power of Satan. He was “made lower than the angels” precisely so that—“by the grace of God,” the writer remarkably says, “He might taste death for everyone.” Paul also reminds us that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinner (1 Tim 1:15). Quite simply, *He was born to die.*

Jesus  
Christ  
was  
born to  
die

Hebrews 10:4-10

*“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,*

*‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.*

*Then I said, “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,*

*as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.”’*

*When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

Again we see the necessity of the Incarnation: because of the ineffectuality of repeated animal sacrifices for the ultimate covering of sin, Christ comes and takes on a human body in order that He might offer “for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (10:12). And, as the end of His earthly life when He chooses absolute submissions to the Father’s will over His own (Luke 22:42), we see that from the very moment when the Son of God entered into history His primary incentive was likewise to do the will of God. And that will, from the beginning to the end of the Savior’s earthly sojourn, was that He might give Himself to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

#### **Revelation 12:1-5**

*“And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.”*

This mysterious passage conveys what Joe Novenson has called “[A Heaven’s-Eye View of Christmas](#).” It suggests something of the enormity of the cosmic conflict involved as Satan furiously opposed God’s plan to bring the Redeemer into the world (see also Matthew 4:1-10). This Redeemer came through the human race, and specifically Israel (probably what the woman here represents); Satan furiously tried to destroy this divine Agent (and hence God’s plan), but God safely transports Him to heaven to reign in glory.

## Christmas Meditation

### The Manger, the Cross and the Throne

The Manger, the Cross, and the Throne, there are the three great and wonderful events in the glorious life of our Saviour-Lord.

In the manger of Bethlehem He was cradled, whose eternal dwelling place is the Father's bosom. That little Babe is none other than God's Son, He by whom and for whom all things were created, the seen things and the unseen. Oh, wonderful humiliation that the Creator took the creature's place, to live the creature's life! And when He was born, when the Beloved had laid His glory by, to take on the prepared body, prepared by God the Holy Spirit, heaven was opened; light and glory burst forth. Angels announced the glad news which ever since the Prophet had spoken, had been believed, and longingly expected, by the saints of God among the Jews. The first note was "Fear not!" Then came the good tidings that He had come. He had come to live among men. He had come in poverty, in weakness. He who was rich became poor for our sakes.

But why did He come? What was the purpose of His coming? There can be but one great answer to this question. He himself answers it for us. "Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God." That was His word as He came. He knew why He came. In the eternal councils of the God-head it was purposed why and for what He should come into the world. He came to accomplish the eternal will of God. He came to manifest His Love; He came to be the Lamb of God. Oh! We can sum it up in one sentence: "He came into the world to die." He who is the Life, came to give His life. He who was holy, on whom death had no claim, came to taste death. He who knew no sin, came to be made sin for us. The Just One came to die for the unjust. He who is the Fellow of God came to be smitten of God. That is why He was cradled in that manger. It was the first step towards the Cross. We know it is there "He loved me and gave Himself for me." We know it was there "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." And there the floodgates of love and grace are opened wide, and grace more bottomless than the sea pours forth to make us free, to save us for time and all eternity.

The Manger, the Cross and after that the Throne! Yes, He is on the Throne. In holy, wondrous majesty at the right hand of God there is the Man, who laid in a manger, who filled the Cross. Sufferings and death forever gone, never to be repeated. Risen and glorified He is gone to heaven, angels and authorities being made subject unto Him. As surely as He is now on the Father's throne, so surely will He receive from the Father's hand the Throne of all the earth. He looks forward to it; He waits for that Throne. We wait with Him in His own patience. Once more heaven will open. Once more the Glory will fill the heavens. It will be His Glory. Once more the tenants of Glory will be seen. Yet more than all this—"He will come and His saints with Him" to rule and reign with Him.

These are the three great fundamentals of our Faith, of true Christianity: The Manger, His incarnation, the Virgin Birth; the Cross, His sacrificial death, the peace He made in the blood of the Cross; the Throne, the coming glory.

Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!

— A.C. Gaebelein (excerpted from *The Christ We Knew*)

## GLOBAL WORSHIP

### Jubilate Steps Out



*Jubilate* is a marvelous worship and music ministry in the country of Romania in Eastern Europe. Staffed by a team of nationals and Western missionaries working in close cooperation, Jubilate provides worship leader seminars, choir training events and children's choir camps across the country. They also have published many resources for the church in Romania, including a new hymnal, adult and children's choir music, a children's music curriculum, and the Romanian translation of David Peterson's "Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship." For more information on this strategic and effective ministry, please see their website at <http://www.jubilate.ro> (in English as well as in Romanian).

Now Jubilate is stepping out in faith to organize a God-sized event next summer, which they are calling the "Young Musicians Project." In July 2009 a noted orchestral conductor from the US as well as selected instrumentalists from other parts of Europe will come to perform alongside Romanian musicians in the presentation of F. Joseph Haydn's oratorio "The Creation." As many as 100 musicians will be involved in the full orchestra and choir of 50-60 voices. After five days of rehearsals we will be presenting the oratorio in four cities in Romania.

Jubilate's prayer is that the project will be a great encouragement to Christian professional musicians in Romania and also be a witness to many non-Christians who will participate. The 10-day event will include times of prayer and worship together as well as discussions about the coming together of faith and artistic expression.

Jubilate asks: "Please join us in praying that God will use this event in a powerful way in the lives of all who will be involved. Please pray for the logistical arrangements that are currently being made—a location for the week of rehearsals, venues for the concerts, transportation needs, and publicity for the event. We ask you also to pray for God's provision for the needed funds for the project. Thank you so much for your interest in God's work in Romania and for your prayer support for the Jubilate Young Musicians Project."

## WORSHIP EVENTS



### INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING BIBLICAL WORSHIP IN YOUR CHURCH WHICH REFLECTS REALITIES OF THE MULTI-ETHNIC, GLOBAL CHURCH?

Join us for **A World of Worship** - a church-based, life-changing weekend event exploring a biblical perspective on the connections between multi-ethnic worship, global mission, and the local church. Three locations, three questions, three outcomes...

Three Locations	Date	Host
Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX	Jan. 16-17, 2009	Meadows Baptist Church (Plano, TX)
VA/Washington DC	May 9, 2009	McLean Bible Church (Reston, VA)
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	May 22-23, 2009	Bethlehem Baptist Church

[info](#)

### CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



January 24-26, 2008 Grand Rapids, Michigan USA  
sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

[info and registration](#)



**WORSHIP NOTES** is a free monthly online digest of reflections, views, news and reviews concerning biblical worship. It is produced by Ron Man as a publication of **Worship Resources**, a department of Greater Europe Mission devoted to “strengthening the body of Christ in the U.S., Europe and around the world by promoting the priority, understanding and practice of God-centered, Christ-exalting, Biblically-based worship.” To subscribe, please go to [www.worr.org](http://www.worr.org) and click on “Worship Notes” at the top. There are many other free resources on the website also.