

Reflections

on

Christmas

Volume Two



*From The Manger
To The Majesty*

Joseph Tacon

“And without controversy great is
the mystery of godliness:
God was manifest in the flesh,
justified in the Spirit, seen of
angels, preached unto the
Gentiles, believed on in the world,
received up into glory.”
1 Timothy 3:16

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It seems that every year there are so many activities that the possibility of missing the true meaning of Christmas is always present and strong. I have found that for me the best way to avoid this danger is to preach on the Person and work of Christ for the weeks leading up to Christmas Day. I understand that most people aren't preachers and don't have the opportunity to do this, so I hope this booklet will help you keep Christ at the center of the Christmas season.

Accordingly, this book is composed of the notes from a series of preaching done over a two-month period at the Baptist Bible Church of Pisa, Italy, during the winter of 2021.

I have titled this booklet "From the Manger to Majesty." This title is taken from a classic, clear and very important text about the first coming of Jesus Christ: *"And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, he was justified in the Spirit, he appeared to the angels, he was preached among the Gentiles, he was believed in the world, he was received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).*

This is a verse that concisely, powerfully and simply summarizes the fundamental and essential truths with respect to the true Christian faith and to the heart of Christmas.

In this verse we find what the church is to believe, to confirm and to confess with respect to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In the following chapters we want to consider this beautiful statement about our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. I thank God for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you.

In the love of Christ,
Joseph Tacon

Introduction:

No biblical text is an isolated thought that can be taken out of the context in which it was given. To do so is to insert one's own idea, one's own understanding, and ultimately to create one's own interpretation and meaning. In fact, if I were asked my definition of preaching it would be "saying what God said and what He meant when He said it" which is my hope for this booklet.

Having said that, the text of this booklet, 1 Timothy 3:16, is part of a larger discussion; so there are two central points that we need to recognize from the start to help us better understand its contents. These two central points are: the conduct and confession (or we can say the doctrine and practices) of God's church. Reading the whole text makes this clear: *"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."* (1 Timothy 3:14-16).

It is important to understand that the conduct of the church is based on two very important truths with respect to the Biblical concept of the church.

First, we must understand: The Nature of the Church. We must note: *"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,"* (1 Timothy 3:15). The word "house" in the Greek language is (oikos) which has been translated in our Italian Bible three other times in this chapter as *"family."* (v.4,5,12) So, I think we can read the verse like

this, *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the family of God.”* In short, the Biblical nature of God's church is defined and inseparably linked to our relationship as His adopted children through faith in Christ Jesus. *“for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:26).

This reality is very clear in the letters written by Paul in the New Testament. The epistle to the Ephesians speaks profoundly about this truth, *“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;”* (Ephesians 2:18-19). And, *“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,”* (Ephesians 3:14-15).

In another of his letters Paul wrote: *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10). By its nature, we can say that God's church is synonymous with God's family.

Regarding the conduct of the church, when we apply this truth about the nature of the church it becomes clear that there is a way in which we must conduct ourselves as God's family, or as children of the living God. Not to get too far off track, I will just say this for now: Our conduct will be determined primarily by our confession, or, by what we really believe. Or, to put it another way, our doctrine will determine our practices.

If we see ourselves as part of the same family, that will influence how we treat each other. If we see ourselves as children of God, that is, with God Himself as our Father, that will influence our behavior. If we understand the church as a family, then, just as God established an order in the family/household, we will understand that there is an established order in the

church. As part of God's family, we should behave very differently from people who see God as Santa Claus or as their personal genie in a bottle.

In short, the conduct of the church depends largely on how we think about the nature of the church.

Next, we must note the second important truth in this regard: The Character of the Church.

Let's read it again: "*the church of the living God, which is... the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (1 Timothy 3:15). In this case there are two words used to describe the character of God's true church that should impact how we behave ourselves: "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*"

A building is only as good as its foundation. God's true church is founded on the truth of God's revealed Word. The true church does not create its own truth, but rests on the revealed Word of God. In fact, this difference makes a clear and easily recognized distinction between the true church/family of God and all other religions on the face of the earth. As Paul wrote in another place, "*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, among all and in you all.*" (Ephesians 4:5-6). So, for "*the church/family of the living God,*" there is only one source of truth, the Bible, which is her foundation.

As a pillar, we must uphold this revealed truth of God to the world. "This awesome reality lays equally awesome responsibilities on the church. Just as a foundation undergirds a building or a pillar supports the roof, the assembly of believers has been appointed to uphold and undergird, in the world, the truth that God has revealed through Christ. This is a divine call to allow the Word of God to saturate all of life." (1 & 2 Timothy And Titus: To Guard The Deposit; Hughes & Chapell pg.92)

You and I, as believers, must base our lives on God's Word and show that truth to the world in the way we

treat one another, through our attitude toward the lost, and through our obedience to God's will for our lives.

Simply put, the world needs to see Christ in us and through us as His church. Understanding the nature and character of the church should influence its conduct.

This brings us to the second central point of the letter: The confession of the church.

We are first told of the way in which we should see ourselves as part of the church - God's family - and thus how we should conduct ourselves. Then, Paul gives the reason why this is so: because of Who Christ is and what He has done for us.

What did God do in giving us the privilege of being called the children of God and in bringing us into His family? What is the truth on which the church rests and that should be upheld? What should that truth do for us?

At this point it is natural and logical for Paul to record what the fundamental truths of the Person and work of Jesus Christ are for the church which brings us to the great confession made in the following verse: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”* (1 Timothy 3:16).

This great confession should lead us to meditate on what God has done to save us and to give us the privilege of being part of His family.

I pray that this Christmas will cause us reflect to our relationship with God and the privilege of being called His children and members of His family.

**“And without controversy great is
the mystery of godliness:”**

Certainly the Biblical truth of Christmas, that is, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is something outside our ability to fully comprehend, but at the same time it is a truth that is presented so clearly in Scripture that it cannot be denied.

I want to note three introductory statements about this great confession of faith that express the wonder of what God has done to save us and to give us the privilege of being part of His family.

In the first place, we should note: The Reality Of Our Confession. We see this in the first words written: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,”.

When we talk about what God did by giving us the privilege of being called the children of God and in bringing us into His family/church, then we are talking about the greatest mystery in the universe. God Himself became a man! We will talk more about this truth, but for now, we just want to emphasize the fact that there is no doubt that God Himself becoming a man is something we can never understand and something we should never take for granted as believers.

Just three more chapters ahead, we read: “*That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.*” (1 Timothy 6:14-16). There is no doubt that it is a great mystery how “He who alone has immortality and dwells in inaccessible light that no man has ever seen, nor can see” became flesh.

The Apostle John said it this way: *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)*. And again, *“No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18)*. The verse we are contemplating says it this way: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,”*.

Have you lost the wonder of Christmas? It is probably because you have overlooked the greatest fact about it, namely, that God Himself became a man in the Person of Jesus Christ.

We must notice from the introductory words of this great confession a second statement about: The Realization of Our Confession. This is found in the word “great.” We read: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,”*

Remembering that the subject of this confession is Jesus Christ, God incarnate, should cause a deep reaction in our hearts toward the Lord. To make this clear, we need to understand that the word “great” in this verse is μέγας (megas) and has several clear meanings and uses. Some are:

1) *used of intensity and its degrees: with great effort, of the affections and emotions of the mind, of natural events powerfully affecting the senses: violent, mighty, strong*

2) *predicated of rank, as belonging to*

2a) *persons, eminent for ability, virtue, authority, power*

2b) *things esteemed highly for their importance: of great moment, of great weight, importance*

2c) *a thing to be highly esteemed for its excellence: excellent*

3) *splendid, prepared on a grand scale, stately*

(www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon)

From this it is easy to understand that because of Who Jesus Christ is, God incarnate, the realization of that truth should cause intense affections and emotions in our minds and in our hearts. Because of this realization, He must be greatly esteemed in our eyes.

We should be moved when we think about the reality of His Person and work. The reality of Who Jesus Christ is should influence how we behave as part of His family. Our response to His love and greatness must be to manifest that love and magnify that greatness through our lives.

This is what Christmas should do for us, cause us to reflect on the Person of Jesus Christ and His greatness and majesty.

To conclude this chapter, we note from the introductory words of this great confession a third statement about: The Reaction To Our Confession. Again, we read: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,”*.

The reaction to our great confession is found in the word “godliness” which is εὐσέβεια and means:

- 1) reverence, respect
- 2) Piety towards God

(www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon)

The meaning is this: when we truly realize deep in our souls Who our Lord and Savior is, this should cause a reverence, respect and devotion to Christ.

This great confession of the foundation of our faith should influence our conduct as the church of the Living God.

May we remember, as we head into this Christmas season, who we are as part of God's family and why we are part of God's family.

We should be filled with reverence for our God and Savior as we think about what He did to make us His children, and that should cause us to think about how

we should behave/deal with one another in light of that truth.

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on the mystery of the incarnation.

“God was manifest in the flesh”

In the previous chapter, we considered the mystery of the incarnation, but in this chapter we want to meditate on the wonder of the incarnation.

I think the first thing we need to do is to consider what it means when we talk about “God.” I would argue that we will never understand the wonder of the incarnation unless we first understand what it means to talk about the True and Living God.

There is something special when God says something about Himself, so let's read together: *“And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations”* (Exodus 3:11-15).

In this meeting Moses asked God a question: *“Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?”* (v13) and God gives a description of His nature by the name with which He responds: *“I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt*

thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14).

This response from God is wonderful and so profound that we can never really realize its significance.

God does not call Himself "The I was" or "The I will be," but "The I Am." With this answer He is describing Himself as existing from all time, or the Eternal One. This means that no matter how far back you go in the past, God was already there.

In short, God is the One who has always existed.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;" (Isaiah 57:15). "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalm 90:2). Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Psalm 93:2). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

The beginning, as we know it, had its start when the ever existent One, the I AM, decided to create the worlds, the universes, and all that is in them. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1). This is the "beginning" as we would define it, and it all comes from God. Jesus said: "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" (Matthew 19:4).*

To put it simply: Our starting point, the beginning of our history, begins with God Himself.

Consider some other verses from the mouth of God Himself: *"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). "When I made the cloud the garment thereof?" (Job 38:9). "Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;" (Isaiah 44:24). Again, "I have made*

the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.” (Isaiah 45:12).

To put it simply: Everything has its beginning because God brought everything into existence.

Classical Christian thought says that every created thing has a cause. Since God is not created but has always existed, He is the cause of everything created.

When someone asks "who created God?" this shows a profound ignorance of what it means to be God. If God was created, then He would be someone else's creature, or that there is something else that would be equal or superior to Him. To be God means to have no equal. It means to be "the Creator" and not a creature.

Now, let us apply this reality of God to our verse, *"God was manifested in the flesh,"*.

Think of this: He Who created all things become part of His creation. That Eternal One who created time, entered time in human form in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Listen to something written years ago: "Time marks the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist it can have no application to Him. "Began" is a time-word, and it can have no personal meaning for the high and lofty One that inhabited eternity. Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future." A.W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg.39

Let's stop here and ask: What does this mean for us?

Again, Tozer wrote this: "Since God is eternal, He can be and continues forever to be the one safe home for His time-driven children." A.W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg.40

The psalmist said it this way: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* (Psalm 46:1). Isaiah said it this way: *"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the*

Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength” (Isaiah 40:28-29).

Because our God is the self existent One, He is always there and will always be our help. There is no time and no place in which Jesus is not able to answer and act on our behalf.

This means that those of us that know Him are eternally safe. Jesus said it this way: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:27-30).* The New Testament says: *“But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:24-25).*

We are eternally safe in Jesus Christ because He is the God that created all things and is above all things. *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:16-18).*

The wonder of the incarnation is so simple, but so surprising at the same time, that is, He who created all things became flesh. The Creator became a creature.

Now, we need to understand that God Himself told us that He would become a man and give up His life for

men: *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”*(Isaiah 7:14). The New Testament explains this clearly: *“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us”* (Matthew 1:23). Therefore, the Bible is clear that Jesus was not a god that came to be with us, or a man that became god among us; He was God Himself with us.

We read: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:6). That child that was born and the Son that was given is the Everlasting Father, the Mighty God, the Lord Jesus.

Consider this statement from the lips of God Himself: *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”* (Zechariah 12:9-10). What is amazing is that God is speaking in this verse (v.1,3,4,6) and therefore this is a prophecy from God Himself saying that He would be pierced. How is it possible that God could be pierced?

Our text gives us the answer: *“God was manifest in the flesh,”* (1 Timothy 3:16). The Old Testament answers it like this: *“But he (Jesus) was wounded (pierced) for our transgressions,”* (Isaiah 53:5).

This the Gospel. God Himself became a man and lived a perfect life thereby fulfilling His own standard. Because of this, He was able to offer His life as the

perfect sacrifice. He did this on the cross of Calvary in our place so that we could be declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He was resurrected to prove that His sacrifice was sufficient to pay our debt, defeat sin, death and hell. (We will discuss this in the next chapter.)

The Eternal God became flesh and gave Himself for our sins! Hallelujah! Glory to Jesus!

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on the wonder of the incarnation.

“was justified in the spirit”

In the last chapter, I tried to give us some insight into the reality of the phrase "God was manifested in the flesh." We said that this is the soul of the Gospel.

God Himself became a man and lived a perfect life thereby fulfilling His own standard. Because of this, He was able to offer His life as the perfect sacrifice. He did this on the cross of Calvary in our place so that we could become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

This is the foundation, that is, the fact on which the whole doctrine of the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ rests- that God was manifested in the flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ.

I cannot understand why various groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, say that Jesus never said he was God. Jesus himself said: *“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins”* (John 8:24). At the end of that same interaction Jesus said again: *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day. He saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old. Have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM”* (John 8:56-58).

The religious leaders in that day understood well the fact that Jesus was declaring that He was God and therefore they wanted to stone Him: *“Then they took up stones to throw at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. Going through their midst, He passed by;”* (John 8:59).

But, this was not the first occasion when Jesus clearly declared that He was God. A few chapters earlier we read: *“John 5:18 MEV - So the Jews sought even more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father,*

making Himself equal with God.” (John 5:18). Then, again a few chapters later: “The Jews answered Him, “We are not stoning You for a good work, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, claim to be God” (John 10:33).

Without any doubt, Jesus made Himself equal with God, and therefore we can and should read 1 Timothy 3:16 thus: *“and without controversy.... God was manifest in the flesh.”*

This is the foundation of the Christian faith and the saving work of Jesus Christ. This confession of our faith prompts us to say if a person, church, denomination, group, or religion denies the fact that Jesus Christ was God incarnate, then they are not a child of God and are not part of the church of the Living God.

The second essential aspect of our great confession of faith is found in the next phrase of 1 Timothy 3:16, namely: *“was.. justified in the spirit.”*

These first two sentences make a pair of bookends regarding the entire life and earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. "God was manifest in the flesh" speaks of His incarnation and entry into the world while "was justified in the spirit" speaks of His actual life to the end.

The phrase "was manifested in the flesh" refers to the divine nature of Jesus Christ while the phrase "was justified in the spirit" refers to the demonstration, or the proof of His divinity, that is, His perfect life.

To understand this, we must understand the word "justified" in this verse, which is δικαιόω that is used in three senses in the New Testament:

- 1) *to render righteous or such he ought to be*
- 2) *to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered*
- 3) *To declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be*

(Blueletterbible.org, interlinear)

The first use of this word (*to render righteous*) does not apply to Jesus Christ because He was not made righteous, but was righteous in Himself. Some verses that make this clear: *"For he (the Father) made Him who knew no sin (Jesus) to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. Jesus is "the Righteous One" who by His merit can cause the unrighteous (sinful humanity) to be declared righteous before the Father. Again, we read: *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:" (1 Peter 3:18)*. Jesus Christ is the Just One who can lead the unjust back to God because of His death and resurrection.

You and I are sinners. We are unrighteous before God and must be declared righteous through the merit of Jesus Christ by grace through faith in order to be brought back to God relationally. We are separated from God because of sin and can be brought back to Him because of Jesus' righteousness. This is the saving work of Jesus Christ. This is Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, the Shepherd and Keeper of our souls. *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24-25)*.

Thus, the first use of the word "justified" i.e. "to render righteous" is used only in reference to sinful men declared righteous by Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

It seems the right time to ask: Have you come to Jesus Christ by faith because of your sin and your need to be reconciled to God? If not, there is no better time than now to receive the gift of salvation, righteousness and eternal life in Christ Jesus. *"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart:*

that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:8-13).

Those of us who have come to Christ in faith “are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

The other two uses of the word “justified” are:

- 4) *to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered*
- 5) *To declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be*

(Blueletterbible.org, interlinear)

These are what can be applied to Jesus Christ regarding the phrase "He was justified in the Spirit."

Simply put, the Holy Spirit shows and declares to us that Jesus Christ was indeed righteous and just by His nature. There are at least two very clear examples of this in the Scriptures.

First, we see a clear demonstration and declaration from the Holy Spirit about Jesus' perfection at the beginning of His public ministry. We read: “*And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a*

voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matteo 3:15-17).

Jesus' baptism was the beginning of His public ministry and God the Father and His Holy Spirit proved and declared that the first thirty years of Jesus' life were lived in absolute perfection, or, righteousness. That was why His ministry had to be accepted. Earlier in the same chapter, John the Baptist declared, *"For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* (Matthew 3:3). Therefore, no one can argue that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy made in Isaiah 40:3-6. This is absolutely key to understanding John the Baptist's announcement about Jesus Christ. That prophecy says that John the Baptist would announce the coming of *"the Lord"* (Isaiah 40:3). The word used in the prophecy is "Jehovah" which means "the self Existent One." Therefore, John the Baptist was announcing the arrival of the self Existent One, The "I Am "in human form- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

This is declared and demonstrated by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father Himself who said: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17).*

Think about it: God the Father declared that Jesus Christ was in Himself, by His own merits, pleasing to Him and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus to prove this fact.

You and I as sinners are accepted by God and receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit only after we are declared righteous through faith in Christ, but Jesus was pleasing to the Father and received the witness of the Spirit because of His own merits, or because He was righteous in Himself. So, at the beginning of His public ministry *"Jesus ... was justified in the spirit."*

Then, we also see this clearly at the end of His ministry. The end of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry was marked by His death, resurrection and return to the Father, and then by the fact that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers forever.

Here, I must say something very obvious: the only way for Jesus to return to the Father after His death was through the resurrection. If He was still dead in a tomb, Jesus could not be with the Father. It is here that we must understand that the New Testament is clear that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the declaration and demonstration by the Holy Spirit that He was righteous (sinless) and that His sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all our sins in the eyes of the Father.

Let us read some verses in this regard:

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:” (Romans 1:1-4). “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Romans 4:24-25). Again, “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Romans 8:11). Then, “for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” (1 Peter 3:18).

The New Testament is clear that Jesus' resurrection is the Holy Spirit's declaration and demonstration that He

was righteous (sinless) and that His sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all our sins.

Thus, the righteousness of Jesus Christ was declared and demonstrated through the resurrection by the Holy Spirit. Another way of saying this is, "Jesus..was justified in the spirit." Then, after His ascension to glory the righteousness of Jesus Christ is declared and demonstrated through the witness of the Holy Spirit in the world today. We read: *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."* (John 16:7-11). A main work of the Holy Spirit is to convince sinners of their unbelief in the Person (the Righteous One) and work (righteousness) of Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that God by His Word and Spirit works to bring us to the point of understanding our need and then we must respond in faith, or not.

This is truly God's grace toward us.

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit.

“was seen of angels”

In the last chapter, we said that the first two phrases of this great confession of our faith (*God was manifested in the flesh, He was justified in the spirit*) form a pair of bookends regarding the revelation of the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ. In them, we see the declaration and demonstration of Jesus' divine nature and His perfect life. This is why He could offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

In short: the work, presence and consequently the witness of the Holy Spirit at His baptism and resurrection removes all doubt that Jesus is “The I Am,” “the self Existent One,” the “Emmanuel” that is, God in human form prophesied by the Old Testament.

The next two phrases of this great confession (*He was seen of angels, He was preached unto the Gentiles*) also form a pair of bookends regarding the revelation of the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ. In them, we see the heavenly and earthly testimony that Jesus is God incarnate, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” “the Savior of the World,” “the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls” as the New Testament declared.

We must keep in mind the fact that the verse is always talking about Jesus and must be read that way: “God was manifest in the flesh,” (Jesus) and “*was seen of angels*”.

To make this clear, the phrase “*was seen*” is the word ὀπτανόμαι (optanomai) and means:

- 1) *to look at, behold*
- 2) *to allow one's self to be seen, to appear*

This speaks of the fact that the angels not only had the privilege of seeing the appearance of the Creator in human form into the world, but as we shall see, they also had the privilege of seeing the entire saving work of Jesus Christ.

Just as the Holy Spirit is a witness for the world regarding the revelation of the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ, the fact that *"he was seen of angels"* is yet another witness that was left for the world regarding His Person and saving work. This one speaks of the heavenly testimony.

Let's begin at the beginning: *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."* (Matthew 1:18-23). In this we see two essential points regarding the divine nature of Jesus Christ in the eyes of the angels.

First, His divine nature was evidenced by the uniqueness of His conception. The angelic testimony is clear: *"for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."* (v.20). Thus, the testimony of the angels is that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of Jesus as *"the Only Begotten Son of God"*.

Then, in the eyes of the angels, His divine nature was highlighted by the uniqueness of His entry into the world. Again, the angelic testimony is clear: *"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being*

interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:” (v.23-24). This was the confirmation of the prophecy made by Isaiah: *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).*

Therefore, this phrase *“was seen of angels”* means that the angels had the privilege of seeing the coming of Almighty God, the Eternal Father into the world at the birth of Jesus Christ from the virgin. The first angelic testimony is clearly that Jesus is God incarnate.

In the second place, when Jesus *“was seen of angels”* they said another amazing fact about Him: *“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.” (Luke 1:30-31).*

I want to emphasize what the angel said about the name of the child in the manger: *“and you shall call his name Jesus.”* To leave us with no doubt the meaning of this name given by the angel has been added: *“for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21).* The name “Jesus” means, “Yahweh saves” or “Jehovah is salvation.” This angelic testimony agreed perfectly with the divine testimony: *“before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.” (Isaiah 43:10b-11).*

To sum it up: to be the Saviour, Jesus had to be God Himself, and this is what the angels testify. So, the second clear angelic testimony is that Jesus Christ is the Savior.

A third fact about the Person and work of Jesus that the angels saw and clearly testify about is: *“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his*

father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Luke 1:32-33). This brings us back again to the prophecy of Isaiah: “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:7). The third clear angelic testimony is that Jesus is the Lord, the King of kings who is to reign.

To conclude, we must consider another occasion when the Lord appeared to the angels that is absolutely essential to His saving work.

In fact, we could say that without without this fourth angelic testimony that our salvation would not be possible: *“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” (Matthew 28:1-6).*

The angels testify about Jesus being resurrected “as he had said.” The same Gospel of Matthew says: *“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). And, “while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the*

hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.” (Matthew 17:22-23). Again, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.” (Matthew 20:18-19). Thus, the heavenly testimony agrees with the divine testimony, that is, the testimony of Jesus Himself.

In short: the angelic testimony is that Jesus Christ is risen and lives eternally!

The Lord Himself spoke of this truth: *“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26).*

How awesome it is to understand that the baby in the manger opened the way to the majesty for us!

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on Jesus' resurrection.

“was preached unto the Gentiles,”

In the last two chapters, we were trying to understand that the first two phrases of this great confession of our faith form a pair of bookends with regard to the revelation of the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ. *“God was manifested in the flesh”* speaks of His incarnation and entry into the world while *“He was justified in the spirit”* speaks of His actual life to the end. The phrase *“was manifested in the flesh”* refers to the divine nature of Jesus Christ while the phrase *“was justified in the spirit”* refers to the demonstration and proof of His divinity, that is, of His perfect life. Then, the next 2 phrases also form a pair of bookends regarding the testimony about the Person the work of Jesus Christ.

The phrase *“was seen of angels”* refers to the angels' testimony that Jesus was God incarnate, The Saviour and risen Lord. *“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay”* (Matthew 28:5-6). This brings us to the next phrase, *“was preached unto the Gentiles,”* which refers to the earthly or human witness of Jesus Christ.

One commentator wrote, “The angels were the least removed from Him and the Gentiles were the most distant. And He “was preached among the Gentiles.” The whole realm of intelligent creation saw Him. There was cosmic witness to Christ on earth and in heaven.” (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus; Hughes and Chapell; pg.95) So, *“was seen of angels”* refers to the heavenly testimony of Jesus while *“was preached unto the Gentiles,”* refers to the earthly or human testimony of Jesus Christ.

We need to understand that God's plan is that His Name and the knowledge of His salvation be spread throughout the earth, so that all people might be saved. The entire testimony of Scripture makes this fact very

clear. *"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;"* (Isaiah 42:6). *"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."* (Isaiah 45:22). *"And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6). And still: *"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."* (Galatians 3:8).

It is important to understand that God in the Old Testament was interested not only in the salvation of the nation of Israel, but also in His greatest and oldest enemies: *"And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them."* (Isaiah 19:22). And a few verses later in the same chapter, we read: *"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."* (Isaiah 19:24-25). The law itself was full of provisions for the stranger that wanted to worship the True God: (Ex. 12:48-51; Lev. 17:8-9, 19:33-34, 22:17-18....) The Book of Jonah and The Court of The Gentiles, among other examples in the Old Testament also show us the heart of God has always been towards all men.

God's love and His desire to save extends from those whom He called to be His special servants to those who were called His enemies. It is for that reason that *"God was manifested in the flesh and was justified in the spirit"* was to be witnessed not only by angels, but also

by the nations. To this day, the nations are testifying about God and His salvation through Jesus Christ.

What did these early Jewish believers preach to the Gentiles? What were they testifying about Jesus?

We do not have to speculate about this, because the New Testament records for us the interaction and preaching between the early Jewish believers and the Gentiles at the birth of the church. *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”* (Acts 10:34-43).

From this account, among many others, the essential points of the message to the Gentiles (nations) are clear: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment or realization of God's promises to come in human form to be the Saviour and Judge of the world, His salvation is not limited to any nationality but is available to anyone who believes in Jesus the Risen One for the forgiveness of sins. Later in

the same book, it is made clear that there is only one way of salvation for all people, namely faith in Jesus Christ alone. We jump five chapters ahead to a meeting of church leaders who answered once and for all any questions about the message that was to be given to the Gentiles, or the nations. *“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”* (Acts 15:7-11).

From this it is clear that God does not save some people in one way and others in a different way. There is not one way of salvation for Italians and another way for Americans. Bible Baptist Church of Pisa does not believe and preach the American way, but we believe and preach “the Way” of salvation, that is faith in Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, this same chapter, among others in the New Testament, reiterates that this period called “the church age” when God would call the Gentiles was part of His eternal plan for the ages. *“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the*

beginning of the world” (Acts 15:14-18). Beloved, our sin and our need for a Saviour was in God's heart and mind before the foundation of the world!

Glory to God that this message that *"was preached unto the Gentiles,"* has come down to us in 2024!

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on God's eternal love.

“was believed on in the world,”

History tells us that Jesus Christ was (and still is) preached to the nations and was (and still is) believed on throughout the world. The Baptist Bible Church of Pisa is a testimony to this fact. Consider how many nationalities are represented each time we gather as a church: Italian, American, Brazilian, Ukrainian, Dutch, African, Spanish, Honduran, Indian, Filipino, Moldavian, and Albanian. Not counting some of the others who, for different reasons, are no longer with us as part of the church family.....

Jesus' mission was and is to glorify the Father by making Him known. *“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:1-4).*

This same mission is the mission of every believer. A few verses later, in the same chapter, Jesus makes it clear that this is a part of the call of every believer: *“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:18-21).*

That Jesus be preached and believed on to the ends of the earth is what we call, "The Great Commission."

Jesus spoke about this on several occasions, but the best known occasion is probably: *“And Jesus came and*

spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus' mission to glorify the Father by saving sinners has been fulfilled, and is being fulfilled to this day. My prayer is that this little book will be a testimony to that fact.

The letters of 1 and 2 Timothy show us some examples of the reality that Jesus *"was believed in the world."* Consider the example of Timothy's family: *"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5).* In today's language, Timothy was what we would call "a third-generation believer."

Interestingly, the Bible does not record his father as a believer: *"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:" (Acts 16:1).*

Despite this fact, the rest of the family had believed in Christ. What a beautiful example of His mission to seek and save sinners. But, the letter of 1 Timothy shows us one of the most beautiful examples of this reality: *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus*

Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

This brings us to the question: What are the consequences of the fact that Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, "was believed in the world"? There are at least two clear ones.

First, the receiving of Jesus Christ, that is, that the gospel "*has been believed on in the world*" is a fact that should create joy.

The angels, who saw and announced the arrival of the Savior, the incarnate God, rejoice when a sinner receives Him. "*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*" (Luke 15:7,10). If the angels rejoice when the Gospel is believed, should we not do so as well?

Paul said that those who believed the preaching of the Gospel done by him and other brothers was his joy and crown. "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy*" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). If Paul rejoiced when the Gospel was believed, then shouldn't we?

A pertinent question is: *Do we consider it our joy to be used by God to change someone's eternal destiny from hell to heaven?*

The fact that the gospel "*has been believed on in the world*" should be a source of joy for our lives.

Then, the second consequence of the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ "*has been believed on in the world*" concerns the church/Family of God. As we have previously mentioned, the Apostle Paul wrote clearly about this reality in other of his epistles, but more deeply in his letter to the Ephesians. In this epistle it is

very clear that receiving the Gospel gives us entrance into the church and makes us part of God's family. We read: *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved,"* (Ephesians 1:5-6). *"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"* (Ephesians 2:14-19). And again: *"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the*

beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (Ephesians 3:1-12).

Therefore, the fact that the Savior, God incarnate, "was preached among the Gentiles" and "was believed in the world" means that we are living in a special time when every believer is part of the church and the family of God! We are brothers and sisters in Christ and soon there will be a big family reunion in heaven!

There is nothing more important and more beautiful than the privilege of being part of God's church/family and sharing the gospel with others.

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on salvation in Christ Jesus.

“was received up into glory.”

In this last chapter, we want to consider the last phrase of this great confession of the Christian faith regarding the Person and saving work of the Only Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and Saviour, which is why God's church must behave in a certain way and is also why we celebrate Christmas. We are also considering the greatest mystery in the universe, namely, God Himself became a man in the Person of Jesus to give His life as the perfect sacrifice to save us.

The road From Manger To Majesty has been described in various passages through the Bible.

The Old Testament summarizes it like this: *“For unto us a child is born, (the manger) unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. (the Majesty) The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this”* (Isaiah 9:5-6).

The Apostle Paul also described it this way in the New Testament: *“Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (the manger) and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: (the majesty) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every*

tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews puts it this way: *“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, (the manger) and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:” (Hebrews 1:2-3).*

Jesus Himself said it like this: *“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I (The manger) unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” (the majesty) (John 12:27-28).* In short: That road required that He *“who dwells in eternity” “became flesh and dwelt among us,” “to give His life a ransom for sin,”* Who then, *“rose again on the third day” and “was received into glory.”* Without any doubt, the fact that that baby who was born in a manger two thousand years ago was at the same time: *“before all things, and by him all things consist.” (Colossians 1:17)* Is a mystery that we can never fully understand. However, this is what the true church of the living God must believe and confess.

With this chapter we come to the end of the road that leads From The Manger To The Majesty.

So, we want to briefly consider this last foundational phrase of our faith: *“he was received up into glory.”* What are the consequences of the fact that Jesus *“was received up into glory”*? There are at least four clear ones.

To understand them well, I want to summarize very briefly Jesus' precious and very important discourse to His twelve disciples in John's Gospel in chapters

fourteen to seventeen. This was the conclusion of the Lord's Supper (*John 13:28*) and Jesus had just told the disciples that after a short time He would leave them and they would not be able to go with Him. (*John 13:33*) The disciples were upset and saddened by the news that Jesus would leave them alone and their inability to follow Him. (*John 13:36-37; 14:5; 16:6,20*) Then, Jesus told them that He was leaving to return to His Father (*John 14:12; 16:16, 28*) and that His return to the Father was absolutely necessary and would be beneficial to them (and to us) in many profound ways! (*John 16:6-7a, 20, 22*) In short, Jesus reassures His disciples that His imminent departure (death) and subsequent return to the Father in glory would change their lives (and ours) forever.

The first life-changing benefit of this fact is: The presence of Jesus Christ in glory is why we have His presence in this world. We read: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." (*John 14:16-18*). He goes on to say: "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*" (*John 15:26*). From this we understand that it is due to the fact that Jesus was received back to the Father that we now have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is noteworthy that the words Jesus used to explain the origin of the Holy Spirit, "*which proceedeth from the Father*" are the same words used to describe the origine of Jesus Himself: "*Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he*

sent me,” (John :42). Therefore, as Jesus is “*the express image of His (God the Father) person*” (Hebrews 1:3), the Holy Spirit who proceeded from the Father is also part of the same essence as the Father and the Son. All three are equal in essence and Deity. For us, this means that just as God sent a part of His own essence in human form in the Person of Jesus Christ, every person who believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour also receives a part of His own essence in the form of the Holy Spirit. This is possible only because Jesus “*was received into glory.*”

The second life-changing benefit of the reception of Jesus Christ in glory is the assurance that we will also live: “*Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also*” (John 14:19). I believe He is talking here about the new life that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit brings to the believer and also about the eternal life with Christ that awaits us as believers.

At the beginning of this discourse the Lord said that since He would be received into the presence of the Father in glory, we will also be received into glory. “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*” (John 14:1-3).

The apostle Paul wrote quite a bit on this subject: “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*” (Colossians 3:4). Again: “*For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life*” (2 Corinthians 5:4).

In short: when Jesus calls us to Himself, either in the rapture or in death, we will be in glory and begin to truly live. However, Jesus also told the disciples (and us) that

in the meantime it would be possible to have abundant life in the present time because of the presence of the Holy Spirit who would be sent to dwell in every believer. *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:16-18).*

I do not think it is by chance that Paul also speaks of the reality of these two senses of living as believers in the next chapter of 1 Timothy. *“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).* There is this present life and the future life. Because Jesus “was received into glory” He promises that we (in every sense) will live.

The third benefit/consequence of The reception of Jesus Christ in glory means the reality and confirmation of a personal, deep and intimate relationship with God. *“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).*

At the conclusion of this discourse the Lord prayed these words: *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the*

foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:20-26).

Jesus’ prayer for each of us who have believed in Him is that we would have deep unity with the Father, with one another, that we would love Him, and be assured of the Father’s love for us. The Apostle Paul said this in a simple way in another one of his letters: *“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).* This is possible now because Christ *“was received into glory”*.

To conclude, the reception Jesus into glory is the fountain of our hope. Paul wrote: *“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:” (Colossians 1:27)* and: *“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4).*

How beautiful is the first coming of Jesus as our Saviour and how great is our hope in the expectation of His second coming to bring us to Himself!

I pray that this Christmas will make us reflect on the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

A Personal Appeal:

With these pages I have tried to exalt our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ who went From The Manger To The Majesty. I hope that in some small way He has been magnified and that your spiritual eyes have been opened to His majesty.

I have tried to make it clear that Christmas is not only about the baby in the manger, but also about the Son in His majesty. The manger leads to the cross. The cross leads to the empty tomb. The empty tomb leads to the majesty and the glory of heaven.

For those of us who are believers, I hope that these pages have sparked a reverence, respect and devotion to Christ that will influence how we conduct ourselves as members of the family and church of the living God.

For unbelievers, I hope these pages have clearly communicated the Person and saving work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. I ask you to consider your relationship with the Lord in light of the truths presented in this book and during the Christmas season. He has been preached to you- will you believe in Him?

It would be my pleasure to respond to any questions you might have concerning the truth of the way of salvation which is in Christ Jesus alone. You can contact me at:

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*From The Manger
To The Majesty*

Joseph Tacon

