



CHRIST-MAS GREETING December 2020



“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

A COMMAND OF COMFORT

To these humble shepherds, in many ways the least of society at the time, came the command, “Fear not.” Historically, they lived in a time of fear. Israel was under the iron fist of Rome. Herod had been installed as king—an Edomite who sought to reclaim the original birthright bartered away by Esau (Heb. 12:16–17). Though famed for his rebuilding of the temple, Herod’s real goal was to gain control of the record of genealogies, so as to destroy the list containing the lineage of the Messiah. Later, when the Magi came, reporting that Messiah had been born, Herod became frantic, and slaughtered all the infants of the region of Bethlehem.

In addition to the madness and cruelty of Herod, there was the corruption and abuse of the religious class. The Chief Priests and Sadducees enriched themselves at the expense of the people, while the Pharisees wielded the cudgel of the law to oppress the people, all the while exalting themselves.

Yet to these shepherds, who raised the lambs used in the daily sacrifices in the temple, the angelic messenger came. Accustomed to fear from so many powerful forces, the shepherds were overwhelmed with fear at the angelic appearance. Here we see the difference between divine and earthly power. Men abuse their power to dominate and subdue all others. God, who is Almighty, comes in power to comfort and to deliver from all other fears. In the great leap of the condescension of the Son of Man, the God of glory became an infant in a peasant family, cradled in the rude manger of a stable.

A POWERFUL PROMISE

There was little cause for joy in the life of a shepherd in the hills of Judea. They lived in isolation and hardship, enduring the searing heat of summer, and the freezing winds of winter. Life for them was one thing: to care for the sheep—to shepherd the flock. Is it any wonder that the God of Israel took for Himself the title of Shepherd, to illustrate His care for His people? Of all the titles claimed by the Lord Jesus, the most comforting and loved is this: “*I am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11).

This great joy, which the angel announced to these shepherds, was that the Good Shepherd had come. The One who Himself would be treated as an outcast (Jer. 14:8–9), had come to gather and claim the outcasts of this world under His care. The angelic messenger was not sent to the Royal palace, nor to the Temple, but to the shepherd fields of Bethlehem, with his message of joy. And what is joy, when we define it practically? It is the fulfillment of the greatest and dearest hopes of the human heart.

A FOCUS FOR FAITH

Victory over fear and joy through hope realized requires a tangible focus, an anchor for the soul. *"This day,"* said the angel. Not *"someday,"* but today, *"in the city of David,"* the location confirming the prophecy. Even the corrupt priests and scribes could identify the birthplace foretold by the prophet Micah: *"In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"* (Matt. 2:5–6; Micah 5:2). The Great Shepherd of Israel sent His angel to those who would understand His mission, as foreseen by their own Shepherd-King so long ago, *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"* (Psa. 23:1).

In the perfect timing of God (Gal. 4:4), *"today,"* and in the specified place, *"Bethlehem,"* came the miracle of the incarnation of God in human flesh, *"a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* It is the Person of God's gift to men that is the focus of the message, not the time nor the place. Jesus Christ came into this world at a specific time and place, but the joy He brought is timeless and universal, *"great joy which will be to all people."* The message of *"this day"* to them was intended for this day to you. And the specified place of *"the city of David"* is now expanded into the citadel of each human heart in which He dwells by faith.

It is the prayer of Nan and myself, and all the Basic Training team, that each of you will know the comfort and wonder those ancient shepherds experienced, as the *"Savior, who is Christ the Lord,"* continues to be the focus of your faith, the fulfillment of your joy, and victory over all your fears!

MISSION REPORT (NAN)

As we approach Christmas and the celebration of the Savior's birth, our hearts are filled with thankfulness for the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ! (2 Cor. 9:15)

We would be amiss if we would not also thank each of you for the prayers, encouragement and support that you have so graciously poured into our lives and the outreach of Basic Training Bible Ministries. As you know, 2020 has been a very unique year and though our travel has been greatly restricted, God continues to work both at home and abroad. Here are a few highlights of what your prayers and support have accomplished:

- **FEEDING THE HUNGRY**

During the Covid restrictions, we have been able to send extra support to our regular co-workers in India, Peru (Pastor Julio and Betty), Pakistan, and Nepal in order to supply much-needed rice and basic food necessities to day laborers who were going hungry due to the shut down of jobs (most of you know the names of these workers but, in sensitive areas, we seek to protect their identities). Ministries of compassion encourage the Body of Christ but also give open doors to the sharing of the Gospel, which is crucial at a time when the world seems upside down and hearts are questioning eternity.

- **PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Ese Bible Institute continued to meet in Numba Village even though the regular instructors from the USA and Australia were not able to be there. God used graduate students from former years, Pastor Michael Pijai and Taylor Tioja, to take over the work of teaching and instructing the new intake of students, fulfilling the mandate to equip the

indigenous people to edify and evangelize their own. We praise God that His plan is not thwarted by world conditions, nor dependent on any one person or persons.

- **NAGALAND**

The children at Bethel Children's Home continue to grow and thrive under the loving care of Throngji and Ayungla and their staff. This Christmas, the orphanage had a pre-Christmas visit from officers of the Indian Army who are stationed on the mountainside just above the orphanage. They presented the girls with gifts and, in turn, invited them to the Army base for a Christmas lunch. At the lunch, the girls—with their beautiful songbird voices—blessed the officers with traditional Naga songs as well as Gospel songs. This is a big deal due to the fact that the Indian Army is predominantly Hindu and are often seen by the Naga people as intruders. Yet, here, they are reaching across tribal, religious, and cultural boundaries to give gifts to these little orphans. Please pray for continued interaction between the orphanage and the Army, that The Lord might use the girls and staff to display the love of Christ to an unreached group of soldiers.



NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Gene has used the better part of this year to slug his way through the writing of *Notes on The New Testament*. He has completed the Gospels and Acts, both of which will be available on the website upon completion of the editing. He is currently finishing Romans and, by God's grace and your prayers, hopes to be done with the project by Spring. Please stand with him in prayer and ask the Lord to use this work to equip our co-workers around the world with sound understanding of God's Word.

As this year saw the passing of some good friends and faithful supporters into the presence of our Heavenly Father, we also experienced the joy of new arrivals. Our daughter, Katie, gave birth to our 11th grandchild, Isabella Zanich. Soon after Christmas, we anticipate the birth of our 12th grandchild, a little girl, to be born into the Cunningham Clan as the daughter of Cody and Amy. Good-byes and hellos are all a part of life on this earth, but won't it be glorious when there are no more good-byes, and we are all together for eternity in the Presence of Jesus Christ? Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Your co-workers for the King,

Gene and Nan Cunningham