

Devotional 4

Yesterday we celebrated Christ's incarnation. Today is our day of worship. On this day we gather with God's people to praise the Lord who has delivered us from our sins and worked peace between the offended God and his offending people. This is what the Angelic host proclaimed to the Shepherds so long ago.

The peace of which they spoke is the peace Christ would accomplish by his death, resurrection and ascension. Only by his work on the cross can there be true peace, for only the cross could remove the offense of our sin from before the face of God. And though the peace of which the Angels spoke would only be accomplished on Golgotha, they spoke as if peace had already come – but how could they speak of peace if the foundation for our peace with God was yet to be laid?

While it is true that the birth of our Lord was not enough to work peace between God and man, the birth of our Lord initiated a series of events that inevitably led to the cross. The cross was not an accident along the way. Sometimes the cross is viewed that way, as though Jesus was swept up in a wave of hatred beyond his control. The truth is that the shadow of the cross already lay on the manger. Jesus was born to die! And for this we celebrate his birth. Our Saviour took on flesh so that it could be nailed to the tree. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

But the story doesn't end with the birth of this cute and cuddly baby. Though it was eight days after our Lord's birth, we're going to consider the importance of Jesus' circumcision today. In the OT, circumcision signified and sealed to Abraham's offspring the promise of the Lord: that he would be their God and that he would forgive their sins – in the way of faithful obedience to Him. It is important at this point that we remember that the Lord had given that promise to his people – on the basis of the work which the Messiah would (someday) accomplish. I will surely be Your Father, He had said, for the sake of Him who is to come! And I will forgive all your sins, He had said, because He (the Messiah!) will 'pay the bill' for you. So it is that circumcision sealed God's grace to his children.

And now Jesus is circumcised. But, whereas **the grace** of the Lord was sealed to every son of Abraham, the Lord now said to his Son: You, my son, **must work!** To every other Israelite God said (as a matter of fact, he sealed it to them in their flesh!): I will be your Father – **because** of the One who is to come! But to Jesus God says (and he sealed it to him in his flesh also): I will be your Father – **on the basis of your own work!**

The 'bit of blood' that was spilled at the time of circumcision was a guarantee **to every Israelite** that God would not require any more blood of them. That little bit of "**circumcision blood**" was **a testimony of and a witness to** the grace of God! Circumcision was (it always had been!) **a sacrament unto life** – though, to be sure, it called for, it demanded an obedient covenant-walk-of-life, **lest you be cut off!** That reality puts our baptism in perspective!

It was for good reason that John the Baptizer balked at Jesus' request for baptism. John knew that his baptism was a confession of sin; a symbolic death in the waters of the Jordan. So why should Jesus be baptized?

There are a number of possible answers to this question. Of concern to us is the anointing with the Spirit that Jesus received at his baptism – though here too we might wonder why the Lord needed to be anointed by the Spirit since he was true God, and therefore one with the Spirit. We must, however, see Jesus here in his humanity, as the one who came in the flesh to fulfill all righteousness, that is, to fulfill God's demands on behalf of his people. In his humanity Jesus needed the presence and power of the Spirit to fulfill his office. This was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the anointing of the prophets, priests and kings.

As believers we should be encouraged by this event. Through faith we are united to Christ and so share in his anointing. Like branches grafted into a vine, we receive the life-giving power of Christ through faith in him. We too must live the new life we have in Christ. But this is only possible through the indwelling of the Spirit. We receive the Spirit from the One in whom the Spirit dwelt in fullness. If we would live in the power of the Spirit, we must be united to the Spirit-filled Messiah.

No doubt, Mary had heard what the shepherds were saying to one and all about the wonderful things that had happened that night when Christ was born. But Mary did more than just listen; she treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. We don't know what thoughts were generated in Mary's heart, or how clearly she understood the significance of these events at that time. But we know that they aroused in her heart a thoughtful reflecting. There was more to this son of hers than was immediately evident. We have the advantage of knowing what that more was. And so we should ponder these things all the more.

The Christmas season is over for another year. Soon we'll pack up all the lights and put away the tree, and we will get back to the regular routine of life. But we must still ponder these things in our hearts. The events of Christmas not only echo down the ages, they must echo also in every day of our life. Our Messiah was born! We know his name, we know his ancestry, we know why he came. But do we allow those truths to permeate throughout our life? Or do we simply pack up such thoughts as we do with so many of the other elements of the Christmas season?

Like Mary we must allow these events to continue to inform and illuminate our hearts and lives. Christmas day is only one day the year, but the celebration of Christmas must last throughout our life. So let us treasure up all these things, and ponder them in our heart. We will find in them great joy and power as we live each day.