

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

John 15-17

Jesus Spirit Became Flesh

BY MATTIE ANN CALLIER-SPEARS

Many, many, many years ago... before the foundation of the world and before life as we know it, there was the WORD. The WORD was God and the WORD was with God. The same was in the beginning with God. All life sprang from the WORD. The Light that illuminated the darkness and the WORD are one. [St. John 1:1-5]

The Word (Jesus) and the Light (Jesus) was sent by God, the Father, to be conceived in the immaculate womb of a young, innocent girl named Mary; who was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter. When the young girl found that she was with child, after being told by an angel, people in the town began to talk. Joseph was skeptical for he knew he had not touched her. "How could this be?" Joseph exclaimed! The angel, of the Lord was surely busy--he had to explain this phenomenon to Mary and comfort her. Then, he had to explain this to Joseph and keep him from leaving Mary.

They were married. As the WORD grew in the womb of Mary, an angel appeared again, and told Joseph to take his wife and flee. They fled to a little town called "Bethlehem." They were met with resistance; for there were no vacancies in any of the hotels or boarding houses. Joseph, slowly and cautiously, searched and inquired. Mary was burdened with child. Finally they found lodging in a cattle's stall.

In the meantime, all the heavenly host of angels were gathering for the announcement, which was fast approach-

ing. A bright star appeared high in the sky and hung over the place where Joseph and his little wife came to rest. Out in the fields, the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks. Everybody, in the towns around and about, was going about their business as usual. They didn't know that the most perfect, the most royal, the most precious and the most blameless person to be born of a woman, was, in fact, being born in their little insignificant city...Bethlehem.

Why did God pick this town? Why didn't he choose Rome or Jerusalem or Galilee? God had a plan. Everything that happens on this earth is in God's plan. Nothing occurs in this world that God is not aware of.

Then...the WORD became flesh. The baby was born! The angels, with jubilant sounds, sang "Glory to God in the highest. Peace and goodwill to all men. Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let the earth receive her King." Mary rested amidst the hay. She wrapped her child in strips of cloth (swaddling clothes) and laid him in a feeding trough filled with hay (manger). All of this was supposed to happen. Because God ordered it. God even told Mary what name to give her child. When Mary was yet with child, an angel appeared to her. "You shall bear a son and his name shall be called Jesus.

Jesus... Jesus! There is something about that name. As the angels sang, the shepherds looked up with amazement. The angels told the shepherds where the baby was and what his ap-

pearance would be like. "You shall find a baby, lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes." The star shown so bright and pointed the way for the shepherds. The shepherds stopped what they were doing and went with haste to honor the new baby Jesus.

Soon to arrive were three different kings from three different countries. With them, they carried treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They came a great distance, following the star, to worship, to bow down and to honor the WORD which was now in flesh appearing.

Herod, the King, heard these things, which were occurring in his jurisdiction, and he was troubled. "Who is this king they are referring to?" He was very angry. He was so angry that he ordered all babies from two years and under to be killed -- Trying to get to Jesus. Then Herod himself died. After his death, Joseph took his wife and child, left Bethlehem and went to Galilee to dwell in Nazareth. An angel had appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that the ones who had sought to take the life of the young child are now dead. Herod had attempted to bribe the three wise men into telling him where the baby Jesus could be found. He said, "Tell me also so that I may go worship him." He was lying and God knew it. Those busy angels appeared to the wise men and told them to depart the country by another route, a way where they did not have to pass through Herod's territory. Herod thought he was slick, but God, who sits high, was watching his every move. Oh yes! God had mis-

ter Herod's number backwards and forward. Isn't that too bad that it has to be like that.

There are some of us, right now, who are trying to pull slick moves on God. And God just reaches down and "Whopp!"

The immortal became mortal. What was spirit was now flesh. Why is it that what seems small and insignificant to man means so much more to God. God has a way of taking little things and making a lot out of it. Just like the little baby in the manger. Very few humans actually knew of his birth, but the ones who found out wanted to kill him. The shepherds and the three wise men got personal invitations to the baby shower. God just does stuff and waits for us to catch on. It's that "choice" business that he gave to us. Sometimes I wish he hadn't given it to us because we just mess up so much. St. John, chapter one and verse ten says, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his people received him not. But--to all those who did receive him, he gave to them the power to become sons of God, even if they would believe on his name." For there is power in that name.

While I was in New Orleans, the pastor of Second Zion Baptist Church #1, Rev. Matthew McGary, said "How come God gave us this choice? He's all powerful. He's all knowing. He knows what we are going to do before we do it. So...why doesn't he just tell us what to do? But, you see, if he did that he wouldn't be God. For -- it is through

challenges, trials, conflicts, pain and sorrow that we become strong. If we had it good all the time, we would surely get bored. That's just the nature of man. If man didn't hurt, he wouldn't have a need to call on God. God is the supreme being who brought this world into existence. He is so awesome that he can just wave his hand and an entire nation ceases to exist. He can speak and the dead will rise. He can just breathe on dry bones and they will become alive. He can dip his finger into the sea and turn it into blood. His wonders never cease. So why Lord, why do you let me choose?"

Jesus became flesh so that he could get a first hand impression of just what man was going through. I can imagine God saying, "Why are they so hard headed? I've done everything for them. What more do they want? There must be something else." So...he sent Jesus, an extension of himself, to be wrapped in flesh, to experience the temptations, to feel the pressures of the world, to laugh, to cry and then to die. He who knew no sin...took on the sins of the entire world, nailed them (our sins) to an old rugged cross and then returned from whence he came--at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

From spirit to flesh and then back to spirit. The Holy Trinity shall always be intact: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The God we serve is not a God of hard knocks; instead, he is a God of compassion, a God of mercy, a God of grace and a God of overwhelming LOVE. However...if, after God has

warned you over, and over, and over again about the same thing; if your head is so hard and you are just going to refuse to do what God has instructed you to do...Oh well! My scripture says that God will just take his hands off of you and just let you go and do whatever. And should you fall into this big hole that God had been warning you about and just let you go and do what he voice...Oh well! I don't even want to think about it.

It's just like it was when you were little. Do you remember when your mother or your grandmother would tell you "Now, don't you keep sliding down those steps like that. You're going to hurt yourself!" You remember? But, you chose to ignore her. You continued to do what she told you not to do. You see, she knew what was going to happen before you did; if you continued on that same course. She thought to warn you so that you wouldn't have to feel the pain of disobedience; but, you made a choice. When you got hurt, you ran to her. As you approached her, she would stretch out her arms, cradle you in her lap and proceed to tell you why you got hurt. Following each point, she would ask, "Don't you remember me telling you not to do that?" And your response was a humbling, "Yes mame!" Some of us can't be convinced unless we feel the pangs of the consequence. Why?

Jesus came into this world that we might have life and have more abundantly. But man refuses to listen. Sweet little Jesus Boy...And they didn't know who you wuz.

The Radical Truth About Hannah And Mary

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY

Dean of North Portland Bible College

The texts for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday are 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Hannah's Song) and Luke 1:46-55 (Mary's Song, also called the "Magnificat" from the first word of its Latin version). In the midst of the busyness of the holiday preparations, take time to read these wonderful songs of praise and reflect on their message for the poor and rich alike.

It's no accident that we have two different songs from the Bible as texts this week. With Christmas less than a week away, we ought to consider some aspect of the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ in our classes. And with the other songs we have studied this month, we ought to include another song from the Old Testament. But most interesting of all: these two songs are closely related, so much so that we could call Hannah's song the model for Mary's song, written some 1200 years later.

The parallels extend to the lives of two authors. Both Hannah and Mary were humble women (which means "poor," even for their times). Both had a deep faith in the God of Israel, and were looking for the blessed hope, the coming of the Messiah to save his people. Both women were mothers (Mary was still expecting) whose children each were conceived through the miraculous intervention of the Lord. And both these mothers of Israel (like Deborah before them, Judg 5:7) were rather radical in their understanding of God's work and justice and righteousness in our society, and to pray for the Lord's intervention in righting the wrongs of the world.

Hannah was a victim of a social system (polygamy) which pitted woman against woman in the most intimate family matters. Hannah's rival, Peninnah, had children, which gave her important status in the eyes of the community. But Hannah had no children, and this signified (wrongly) that she was neglected by her husband, and by her God. The husband, Elkanah, demonstrated his love for Hannah, but that did not take the place of a son--for either of them.

Hannah responded to the tormenting of Peninnah with long earnest prayers to the Lord, begging him to give her a son and promising to give her son back to the Lord as a servant of the Tabernacle. In due time, the Lord gave her a son, Samuel, and she kept her vow to the Lord. Samuel grew up to become a powerful, righteous judge over Israel, and the one who prepared the way for King David to unite Israel under the Lord.

Hannah did not fight the injustice of her day with violence, or bitterness. Instead she made a radical commitment to her God, an unusual step which must have challenged Elkanah as well, for he could have prevented Hannah from giving her child away. I believe God saw the humble faith of a godly woman, and was pleased to exalt her in his Scripture by making her a tool for great change in her nation.

When Samuel was old enough to leave Hannah and live in the Tabernacle, Hannah took him there and presented him to Eli the priest--and to the Lord. She understood the radical nature of sacrifice, something few of us in affluent American really know.

At this point, Hannah prayed a song to the Lord, a song I believe she had carefully prepared for the occasion. In this song, certain truths can be discerned clearly. The Lord (Yahweh) is unique, holy, and awesome (1 Sam 2:1-2). He is totally in control of human history, so no-one can boast in his own success (2:3,6-8). And yet he loves the humble and broken people, and he will raise them up (2:4-5), but those who think they can oppose the Lord will be broken themselves (2:9-10).

Her song agrees with the rest of the Scripture, that our God "mocks the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Prov 3:34; 1 Pet 5:5). This is true in all times and cultures, and challenges believers today. Those whose greed and arrogance led them to exploit the banking and real estate markets, those men will be judged--and some already have been. The growing underclass of our society can claim the special protection and love of the Creator of all things, and his promise that he will raise them up.

Unfortunately, many of the poor in America today do not look to the Savior, because his church has often ignored them. If we do not repent, we will likewise be judged and humbled by our Lord. And he will use some other believers to reach out with his love, to those who need it most.

Mary's song of praise is better known, but we usually do not pay attention to the later verses of the song (Luke 2:51-55), which echo the words of Hannah long before. Mary understands that she had no human grounds for exaltation: she was a poor young woman in a Galilean town, betrothed to a very poor but godly carpenter. God has ex-

alted her, and has given her a position where she would become one of the best known figures of all human history: "behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (2:48).

Mary sings praise to her God, for she sees that her own exaltation is part of the Lord's great plan for history. He will lift up the humble, but he will "scatter the proud," even those who harbor pride in their inmost being (2:51). Human suffering is not part of God's will for the world; he allows it for a time to fulfill his purpose, which is far beyond our human comprehension. Neither is human pride, which leads to exploitation of people throughout our world.

But with all this, Mary sings of her faithful God, one whose promises to Abraham and Israel will be fulfilled (2:54-55), in the Person of her Son, the Lord Jesus. Those promises include the establishment of a new world order, not of human design, but of the promises of God. Jesus called this "the kingdom of God," the manifestation of God's righteousness rule on earth. He described it as being "at hand," but it would grow "like a mustard seed" till it "filled the whole earth" and fulfilled the prophecies of Daniel and the other prophets.

Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a wedding feast (we might say a "Major party" today), in which the rich guests were found unworthy--by their own choice--and the poorest people were freely welcomed.

I'm sure he first heard about God's plan for humanity (in his human form) from the lap of his own sweet mother. God chose the right woman to bring his Son to earth. He picked a real radical.

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Minister Gregory Fobbs

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- Men's Training Leadership Women's Bible Class 5:00 pm.
- Evening Worship 6:00 pm.
- Attended nursery for all services
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Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner

Theme: Whatever you're going to do for the Lord, do it now

I Peter 4:11

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