

GLORY TO GOD, PEACE TO MEN

Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! May God bless you to live a life of faith in 1997. May God increase your faith so that you may be a blessing to others as well as to all peoples of the whole world. The historian and evangelist Luke says that Jesus' coming is glory to God and peace to men. Let's think about why the birth of Jesus is glory to God and peace to men.

First, the birth of Jesus is historical.

After the Fall, God made a world salvation plan. God also made a promise to save men from their sins. Even though it was a primitive gospel, it was God's promise to send a Savior to save men from their sins. Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." In this verse, "he" indicates Jesus the Messiah. In order to proceed with his world salvation plan, God chose Abraham, who was 75 years old. God gave him a promise, "I will make you into a great nation...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Ge 12:2b, 3b). God helped him to overcome his fatalism because of his "no son" problem. God also helped him for a long, long 25 years until he loved God and believed in the promise of God. Then Abraham became the first ancestor of faith.

After Abraham, God chose David, because he was a man after God's own heart (Ac 13:22). In short, he was a shepherd-like king. To him, God promised that "your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me..." (2Sa 7:16b). God's promise to David reveals his foresight of the Messianic kingdom through Jesus. Isaiah 11:1 pictures more vividly Jesus' coming to this world. It says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." In the course of fulfilling his world salvation purpose, three times of fourteen generations had elapsed (Mt 1:17). Finally God sent his one and only Son according to his promise. Of course, God may have wanted to send someone else. But there was no one who was sinless. So God could not but send his one and only Son into this world. The fact that God sent his one and only Son reminds us of John 3:16. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." In obedience to God's plan, to come to this world Jesus had to renounce his glory, power and his kingdom, even his righteousness as God. We call this the incarnation of God. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus' coming to this world is full of grace and truth. Jesus' coming to this world teaches us that he is truly humble and sacrificial. Jesus was also obedient to God. As God had promised, he sent his one and only Son into this world. Therefore, the birth of Jesus is not a man-made story; it is a historical fact. We must believe that the birth of Jesus is historical, and that our God is faithful in keeping his promise.

Second a baby in a manger.

At last Jesus, the promised Messiah, came to this world. But he was born in the stable of an animal and placed in a manger. The scene of his birth looks pathetic. Luke, the historian and evangelist comments on it, "because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7b). Isaiah the prophet foresaw the baby in a manger. He was overwhelmed by God's decision to send his one and only Son in that way and cried sorrowfully, "Who has believed our message..." (Isa 53:1). It was too sorrowful news. Oh! Who can believe this? Oh! Who can believe this news?

Seemingly, Jesus in a manger looks too fatalistic. Jesus was born in this way so that he could show men how to overcome their fatalism. In Korea 35 years ago, there were too many fatalistic people due to their national situation, beggar mentality, inferiority complex, feudalism and poverty. Most Korean people thought that Americans were angels and that Koreans were born to be sorrowful. Once I was worn out in the course of helping students one by one to overcome their fatalism. I asked Reverend Mother Barry, "Are there many fatalistic people in America, too?" "No, never. There are no fatalistic people in America," answered she. I was greatly astonished and envied Americans. When I came to America, to my surprise, America was full of fatalistic people. A beautiful girl was crying all the time since her mother left her behind and disappeared. But through one-to-one Bible study the heavenly sunlight smeared into her soul. Since then, her weeping decreased remarkably. When she married a man of God, she never cries. Instead, she smiles quietly and beautifully. One boy who is now 28 years old attended a college for six years but still could not finish the freshman year course work. Thus he became sarcastic and very fatalistic about his prospect of marriage. Many American students are fatalistic because of their laziness and their immoral desires. This is the reason Jesus came to this world in the most fatalistic way; he came to save people from their fatalism and give them new lives.

Third, Jesus gives men salvation from sin.

After World War II, America was the richest country. America had had a Christian heritage. Americans' tacit motto was, "In God We Trust." God blessed America abundantly. But these Americans did not maintain God's blessing. In addition, America adopted pragmatism, thinking that they would be even more prosperous. In the past, America offered foreign students scholarships, tutors, even allowances, and helped them until most of them obtained Ph.D.s. But now the American government charges foreign students 300% more tuition. So America should be more prosperous. But it is not, because they lost God's blessing since they distanced themselves from God and began to love money. America has been distressed because of the astronomical foreign debt. Because of this, most people work and study at the same time. Some people work two jobs. In America, for the sake of their survival, people have not much time to think about the truth that men are both body and soul. Most of them are weary and tired. Naturally they seek the fleeting pleasures of sin to soothe their tired bodies. They are too busy to think about being both body and soul. As a result, America's Christian heritage has almost disappeared, while anti-Christian forces are growing day by day.

When we study the Bible, we learn that God made man both with the dust of the ground and with God's life (Ge 2:7). Therefore, man's physical body is mortal. If one dies, his body goes back to the dust of the ground. But one's immortal soul, which is God's life in us, goes back to God's house and lives there forever. When we study the Gospels, we find that what Jesus did was heal the sick and preach the gospel; especially he proclaimed the kingdom of God. In his healing ministry, Jesus was a comfort to the sorrowful. Once Jesus saw a widowed woman tottering after her only son's coffin. Jesus wiped the widow's tears by raising the dead son. Jesus was eyes to the blind. Once Jesus was passing by Jericho. A blind beggar cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk 10:48) Then Jesus opened his eyes. Thus he gave him a new life. Jesus was a physician to men with leprosy. Once Jesus saw ten men with leprosy. Jesus healed them and made them whole (Lk 17:14). Especially Jesus was a man of saving grace to those who are sitting in the shadow of death. Here "the shadow of death" means the power of sin.

How did God solve man's sin problem? God made his one and only Son shed his holy blood on the cross to cleanse the sin-sick blood of mankind. John the Baptist came as the forerunner of Jesus. John knew why Jesus came to this world. When Jesus was coming toward him, he said to his disciples, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29) Even John, who had the spirit and power of Elijah, could not but cry when he thought about Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and shedding his blood on the cross. St. John was once a selfish man. But in Jesus he became a child of God. John saw that Jesus shed his holy blood for his sins. John described Jesus as the atoning sacrifice (1Jn 2:2). Those who believe in him receive salvation from their sins. John 5:24 says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Fourth, Jesus gives men eternal life.

There are many people who think that death is the end of everything. But it is not true. When we have eternal life by believing in the Son, mysteriously we feel life and power in our souls. When we have eternal life by believing in the Son, mysteriously we are filled with the love of God and his grace. When Dr. James Rabchuk went to see his father-in-law candidate, he asked Dr. Jim, "Do you know how to duck?" "No problem," said Dr. Jim. Then he said, "Okay, no problem." But Dr. Jim does not have to duck to escape from flying dishes, because Mrs. Rabchuk is happy all the time since she has eternal life in the Son.

If we have no eternal life in the Son, our lives are limited to this world. Those who have no eternal life are under the shadow of death. When we do not have eternal life, we have no true meaning of life. There was a renowned professor. He studied hard. He lived a decent life. One day he left his family and society. He survived more than ten years on one dollar a day. Recently he was known as the "Unabomber." His problem was that he had no eternal life in the Son. Men are selfish because of their sins. Selfish people have no fear of God in their hearts. They think only about themselves. Selfish people do not have eternal life. They want money and the fleeting pleasures of sin. Biblically speaking, they are not citizens of America; they are

citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You know very well about Franz Kafka's novels (1883-1924). This is one of the stories from his novels. After being discharged from his army duty, Gregor Samsa got a job. He supported his family with his pay. His parents and his younger brother and younger sister enjoyed family security. One day Gregor was transformed into a most ugly, monstrous bug. Then all the family members had to work. All the family members were distressed because of the neighbor's complaints about his monstrous crying noise day and night. The family members agreed to send him away for their life security. Gregor had to leave his home. Soon he died of sorrow and starvation. This story well describes the selfishness of mankind. But God did not abandon us. He found a way. It was to send his one and only Son to provide the way of salvation for all mankind.

There was a man named Cain. One day his sin-sickness stirred him up. Then he killed his lovely younger brother in the field by hitting him hard. But Jesus is the only one who can save men from their sins.

On the other hand, those who have eternal life through the Son's death and resurrection can live in this world with a living hope in the kingdom of God. Peter, the teacher of human beings, said, "For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever'" (1Pe 1:24). This verse means that those who do not have eternal life in the Son are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. A Christian who was martyred in 1720 said, "Those who have no eternal life are like a piece of wood, and after death is hell." Jesus died for our sins to give us eternal life. Jesus rose again from the dead to give us the living hope in the kingdom of God. When we have no eternal life in the Son, we become the prisoners of death. But when we have eternal life in the Son, we have a living hope in the kingdom of God. While on earth, we work hard and love each other as our Lord Jesus Christ loved us. May God give you eternal life when you believe in the Son.

Fifth, Glory to God, peace to men.

Luke 2:14 is the conclusion of the story of the birth of Jesus. Why is the birth of Jesus glory to God? Here "glory" means revealing. By the birth of Jesus, God revealed his love to the whole world. God also taught us how to live for the glory of God through Jesus. We must live for somebody or something as long as we live on the earth. One chemistry professor did not marry in order to study chemistry well and become a recipient of the Nobel Prize. But it did not work as he had wished. So he became a lonely caveman. In truth he is a godless man. But one woman Ph.D. was invited by a renowned university as a professor. She did not accept the offer in order to serve the flock of God's sheep in Chicago. She is happy because she has eternal life in her and her joy is overflowing. God made man to live for the glory of God. Otherwise, man cannot find the meaning of life.

The birth of Jesus is peace to men. Worldly peace is costly and temporal. In the 1940 American presidential campaign, Wendell Wilkie predicted the coming of one world in which there would be no more wars. But to our dismay, we find that ever since there have been forty wars,

big and small, around the world. But those who have eternal life in Jesus have peace with God. They are no more enemies with God. They are no more enemies with their wives and uncles. As Jesus gave a new commandment, we must love one another fervently. We help each other sacrificially, dwelling in the living hope of the kingdom of God. The birth of Jesus is glory to God and peace to men. May God fill your hearts with one word, glory to God, peace to men.