

The Labor Pains of Redemption

Christmas truly is the “most wonderful time of the year”, as Andy Williams so famously sang in 1963. Or at least it’s supposed to be. Whether or not our Lord Jesus Christ was born on this exact day or not, or some think that He was actually conceived in Mary’s womb on December 25th, the Bible doesn’t tell us precisely. Nonetheless, He did come, and He is not only the Savior and Redeemer of the World, He is God, and that means that He carries every exalted and supreme title that could ever be conceived. Among those most descriptive and accurate titles, He is the Prince of Peace. And as one of our famous Christmas carols puts it, quoting from the Scripture, Lord Jesus came to not only proclaim but literally bring “peace on earth, good will toward men” “with whom He is well pleased”. That being the case, then it should follow that our yearly celebrations of His birth, Christmas, should be the most peaceful time of year. But, ...

[VIDEO: “Christmas Chaos”]

So, now you know!! Well, actually, Mr. Christmas Chaos, tongue-in-cheek as he’s here introduced, really does exist, but in a far more nefarious form as the devil himself. If Christmas time does turn people’s attention to the Savior of the World, then the devil will do anything and everything possible to neutralize its ef-

fects. Among them is certainly to create as much “chaos” in our celebrations as possible. And, couple it with his perhaps most used weapon of all—guilt. Like Mr. Christmas Chaos said repeatedly just now, “you could just say ‘no’ to all those things, but you’d be a jerk, and everyone would hate you!” However, for the sake of the Peace of Christmas, the Prince of Peace, perhaps it’s absolutely not worth not being a jerk! In these hyper-partisan days when seemingly everything and anything is offensive to somebody, all of us will be jerks to somebody, if they cross paths with us and find out that, gasp!, we believe everything the Bible says, and live our lives accordingly. So, if somebody or other is going to be offended by our very existence, that we take up space on this earth, breathe its air, eat its food, well, we’re just more than those other people can put up with. Indeed, in their view, everything would just be so much better off if we would just die already!

But one doesn’t even have to be a Christian these days to offend others. It’s amazing that when the United Healthcare CEO was murdered in Manhattan, thousands of people hailed the killer as a hero! Which brings to mind the reaction of millions of others, whose brains are on extended vacations, who not only applauded the attempted assassination of Donald Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania, but lamented that it hadn’t succeeded. And then urged others to pick up the “torch”, rather guns, and try, try again!

Despite Christmas celebrations, the world in 2024 is more on edge than its been in decades. We’re literally teetering on the

brink of World War III. Truly, violence, the polar opposite of peace, seems to be gaining the upper hand in nearly all the world. Why, it's enough for most good-hearted, rational, "peaceful" people to throw up their hands, give up and retreat to some perceived safe place and hide, preferring to let the "crazies" fight it out until they mostly kill each other off and then, presumably, peace will be restored. Good luck with that!!

Yet, at Christmas, Someone did come onto our scene, into the midst of wars, tortures and oppression. He knew the potential humans have within us to live in peace and compassion. He knew because He made every one of us, instilling those virtues within us, and if we'd just allow them to surface and hold sway in our lives, why, this world would be an entirely different place! This Someone is God, Who came into this truly chaotic, dangerous, seeming hellhole of a world, dodging the lies, the slander, the violence, the killings and wars, not as a worldly strongman, take-charge alpha male supreme commander, announcing his arrival with press conferences, private jets, glitzy pomp, circumstance, dripping wealth, power, a personal, private army, complete with an enormous entourage. No, this Someone came quietly. Stealthily, compared to the world's ways, but actually, having had His arrival heralded and prophesied for millennia in advance. He came, not as an adult man, but as a divine spark of life, a single divine cell fused into union with Mary's ovum in her womb by her permission! Could anything be more quiet? More secret? More "peaceful"?

But as “silent” as this was, it was no “walk in the park”! Lord Jesus was brought forth into the world not in pleasantness, but in pain. While everyone around tried to pretend all was well, Joseph learned that his betrothed Mary was already pregnant, before they had consummated their marriage! I wonder whether Mary had told him before she began to show or after. Either way, it was obvious she had had an affair and been unfaithful to Joseph. But he, not wanting to publicly disgrace her, determined to divorce her “quietly”, which would also minimize the blowback on himself and his own family at the same time. At which point, an angel, perhaps Gabriel, spoke to Joseph in a dream-vision, telling him what was really going on, and it was his God-given mission to go ahead and finish the house and marry her, but to not consummate the marriage until after she had given birth. It seems likely that she had begun to show before their new house was completed, which would be regarded as either fornication or adultery, depending on whom she had gotten pregnant by, and which the law required that she be stoned to death. But before all that could get out of hand, as such things tend to do when humans and gossips get involved, God intervened.

So Rome issued a census. Everyone, anywhere, in the empire, had to drop everything and go immediately to their hometowns to register, and pay their per capita, their head tax. You see, death and taxes have always been with us for as long as humans have had governments! But while this census diverted

people's attention from Mary's questionable pregnancy, it posed new pains. As the Bible takes pains to point out, she was far along in her pregnancy when the census was issued. She had to travel with Joseph all the way from Nazareth in the Galilee, down south, past even Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, which was the ancestral home of the famed King David, which, by the miraculous providence of God, was ancestor to both Joseph and Mary. Under normal circumstances this would have been an arduous journey, which no one would have wanted to embark upon at the drop of a hat. But here was Mary, heavy with Child, presumably riding a donkey for short stints. But donkeys are not suitable for long distance riding, and, if anyone has ever ridden one, it is decidedly not a comfortable experience! So for most of the 90 miles, she had to walk! Probably taking 4-5 days. No walk in the park!

And then once they arrived, word had preceded them that Mary's pregnancy was suspect, and not only were their relatives' extra rooms already full, many were loathe to house a suspected woman of ill repute. More "labor pains". Finally, some sufficiently kind-hearted stranger was led by Holy Spirit to open his stable to them, and Mary was delivered of her burden, and the King of the Universe was born as human baby boy!!

Well, this phase was over. The Savior was born and out of the womb. But this holy couple's troubles had hardly just begun. Within days, King Herod had issued "shoot on sight" orders if the Baby Jesus was ever found. And at the angel's direction, Joseph

secreted the family a whole 430+ miles to Egypt to escape, in haste. At least this time, they probably had camels to ride, paid for by the treasures the wise men had given them. Visits by rich wise men, a motley crew of shepherds, accompanied by choirs of angels notwithstanding, the first several months of Lord Jesus' life, even pre-birth, was an arduous ordeal. For certain, this was no earthly, worldly king. This King was something far, far higher, the veritable Creator of all the Universe. This is the Savior, and this is what He and earthly family went through just at the very beginning of His life. Just a "foretaste" of what would transpire in order for His mission to be accomplished when He came of age to serve God in the Temple, to bring forth our redemption. Puts the aches and pains of our lives in proper perspective, doesn't it?

As the night of His birth, aside from Mary's actual labor pains, and some braying and mooing, was quiet and peaceful, with a brief concert of angels, let us also sing now of His birth.

["O Holy Night" music video]

