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For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

Anchored in Our Walk

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

Christmas and Easter give us the anchor of our walk with Christ. Other holidays may come and go but the reminder of the incarnation of God into flesh, and then the reminder of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God, and His ascension back to the Father's right hand, speak to us of things that are absolutely necessary for eternal life.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). The Word became flesh. The Son of God became a man. This was the only way our sinful souls could be redeemed, by a divine Substitute Who would do what neither Adam nor we were able to do, make an atonement for sin. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Adam walked with God in the garden, in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8) but disobedience made that fellowship impossible. If it had not been that God loved us enough to have His Son come to earth, become a man, and die for the sins of the world, neither would we have a walk with God but only the wrath of God. At this time of the year we think of His incarnation which made our walk possible.

That Word "dwelt" among us or "tabernacled" among us. He dwelt in a "tent" the same as we do but without sin. And, amazingly, He kept his tent of flesh, untainted by sin, and took it back to heaven with Him. As the Rabbi said, "The dust of earth sits on the

throne of heaven" One day our dust will be made incorruptible and our souls immortal so that we will walk with Him in heaven forever. Of this whole process, John wrote, "The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us . . . that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3).

At Christmas we should behold His incarnated glory. That glory was of One begotten of the Father. That eternal Sonship among the eternal Godhead is a mystery beyond our finite comprehension. "I and My Father are One," Jesus declared. The Father, "Who is and Who was and Who is to come" (Rev. 1:4), has forever been with the Son Who is the "Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:11). Since "No one has seen God at any time," John went on to declare, "the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

Jesus Christ was full of grace and truth. "For the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). When we walk with Jesus, we experience grace and truth and show it to the world in which we live. This is because of "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:5-6).

*Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth
Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."*

Joseph: Unexpected Father

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:18-21)

"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). Joseph was not the father of Jesus. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit before Mary and Joseph had consummated their marriage vows. There is not a greater example of a man who walked with God than Joseph, the husband of the virgin Mary.

Joseph was a common man, a carpenter (Matt. 13:55). As a young man it was needful for him to leave his home of Bethlehem and move to Nazareth, a small mountain town in Galilee. While there, practicing his carpenter trade, he met Mary and desired for her to be his wife. As was the custom, he arranged a betrothal vow with his father-in-law to be, Heli. In our modern day, we make the wedding vows to one another (before God) on the same day as the consummation, which happens shortly after on the honeymoon. As is our English custom, consent and consummation are the two parts of a marriage. In Joseph's day, however, consent, or the wedding vow, was made in a legal contract (with the parents' mutual consent) some time before the consummation. Joseph and Mary had given their consent, i.e., their vows, already and were considered husband and wife, though the consummation, traditionally made in the father's house, had not yet happened. Joseph had no other thought than that Mary was a virgin and had kept herself for him until that time.

But Mary turned up pregnant. To Joseph, there was no other conclusion than that somehow, somewhere, by someone other than himself, Mary had been unfaithful. Though the Old Testament law required the death penalty for such adultery (Deut. 21:18-21), God had given special grace in such cases for the wom-

an to receive a certificate of divorce and be sent away (Deut. 24:1-4). We see that leniency extended to both Kings David and Solomon as well as by Jesus with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). Therefore, "Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly."

At this critical time, God intervened with an angel to inform Joseph that Mary was actually the virgin promised in Isaiah 7:14 and that the child in her "is of the Holy Spirit." Still, this had never happened in all history. This was all in a dream. How could this happen now to two such lowly people? All Joseph had to go on was the word of an angel. But to Joseph that was enough. Joseph arose from his sleep and continued with the betrothal vow, though he knew her not until the child was born.

One thing was left. God tapped Caesar Augustus on the shoulder and directed him to decree that Joseph must return to Bethlehem to be registered for Roman tax. Thus we have that beautiful narrative in Luke chapter 2 of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem's manger. Here Joseph's faith would be further tested as he witnessed the amazing visits by shepherds and kings who attested to the deity of this baby. And if that were not enough, God instructed him to take his new wife and son all the way to Egypt for protection from Herod's terrible decree. This Joseph did without a question or doubt. This done, there was a necessary visit to Jerusalem for the circumcision which also included two more amazing visits from Anna and Simeon. Finally, Joseph returned to his shop in Nazareth.

Most of Jesus' life was spent as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). If He says to us, "Take my yoke upon you" He truly knew the purpose involved in making yokes. We have no other contact with Joseph until Jesus was twelve years old and left alone in the temple. When departing from there, Joseph no doubt heard his Son reply to his wife, "I must be about My Father's business." I can imagine that this brought a smile to Joseph. He always knew Who the Father of Jesus was. He knew during all those years the two of them shared in the carpenter shop that this day would come. What else could there be for this amazing Son.

A few men have been asked difficult things from God. But when it comes to walking with God, no one excels beyond Joseph. A simple man was asked an extraordinary thing: "Take up this cross and follow me." Joseph also knew what a cross was.