

Christ entered the world as an infant, a world in upheaval from national and local politics, housing shortages and many, many poor. “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given,” as one carol phrases. At the birth in Bethlehem, God deals with real earnestness and loving concern for fallen man. This week’s notes detail three examples of our Triune God in the Christmas narrative. May God deepen our joy in and enrich our understanding of Christ’s birth for our salvation!

**Mon/Tues: Read Genesis 1:26-28; Isaiah 48:16; Luke 1:34-35      Revelation of the Trinity at the Birth**

We begin at the beginning, when God said, “Let us make man in our image.” Here is the first foreshadowing of the Trinity revealed in Scripture. If God had simply said, “Let us make man,” we could simply see God speaking to the angels at creation. But Augustine says, since God also said, “Let us make man *in our image*,” we know that God was here expressing the counsel of the Trinity as they engaged in making the world and mankind.

Another Old Testament hint that God is Triune is found in Isaiah 48:16, where the Messiah says, “The LORD God” (the Father) and His Spirit have sent me.” Here the Son of God speaks as the Messiah. All three persons are involved in the sending of the Son to be the Anointed Savior of men.

We are not surprised, therefore, to find the same emphasis on the Trinity in the angel Gabriel’s explanation of how the birth of Jesus will take place. Compare these translations of the words of Gabriel to Mary (Lk1:35):

- And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (ESV)
- And the angel answered and said unto her, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (KJV)
- But the angel made this reply to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the most high will overshadow you. Your child will therefore be called holy—the Son of God.” (JB Phillips)

What is clear in each translation is that the power of the Most High (an Old Testament title for God the Father) would so overshadow Mary that the Holy Son of God in human flesh would be conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit! Thus all three persons in the Trinity are at work.

**Meditate and Pray:** Praise God for His work in the salvation of sinners, chosen by grace. Sing about God’s sovereign work through Jesus Christ, using hymn # 449 in our red Trinity hymnal:

1 We rest on thee - our shield and our defender!  
We go not forth alone against the foe;  
strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender,  
"We rest on thee, and in thy name we go."  
strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender,  
"We rest on thee, and in thy name we go."

2 Yea, "in thy name," O Captain of salvation!  
In thy dear name, all other names above;  
Jesus our righteousness, our sure foundation,  
our Prince of glory and our King of love.  
Jesus our righteousness, our sure foundation,  
our Prince of glory and our King of love.

3 "We go" in faith, our own great weakness feeling,  
and needing more each day thy grace to know:  
yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,  
"We rest on thee, and in thy name we go."  
yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,  
"We rest on thee, and in thy name we go."

4 "We rest on thee" - our shield and our defender!  
Thine is the battle, thine shall be the praise;  
when passing through the gates of pearly splendor,  
victors - we rest with thee, through endless days.  
When passing through the gates of pearly splendor,  
victors - we rest with thee, through endless days.

**Wednesday: Read Luke 1:31; Luke 2:21; Luke 15:1-24 & Zephaniah 3:17****Seeking Sinners through the Son's Birth**

The Savior's naming is the very fountainhead of our salvation. Because the Son of God took on human flesh, He took a human name, given to Him by God the Father. With that Name, He was able to stand in our place and save us from the penalty of death due to us for our sins. This name, given to Him by His Father in fulfillment of prophecy, means that the Son of God came to earth as the seeking, saving Shepherd of His people. His very name Jesus means "Savior."

Thus this calling was placed upon the Son of God from the day of His conception: He would come to seek and to save that which was lost. God the Father's naming of His Son in human flesh as Jesus - proves that the Son obediently fulfilled His Father's will in becoming man.

This purpose is further alluded to when Jesus gives two parables to explain to his foes why He is willing not only to receive sinners, the charge in Luke 15:2, but also to *seek them out*, like a good shepherd who goes after the one straying sheep while the ninety-nine stay in the fold, or like the diligent house-keeper who sweeps until she finds her lost coin (Luke 15:1-10).

**Meditate and Pray:** Give thanks for this breathtaking fact about Christ coming into the world. He came to aggressively seek sinners and to claim them for Himself. What a picture of joy as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, accomplishes His work of salvation on the Cross and then, in all His resurrected power, lifts His sheep onto His broad shoulders to carry them home, singing as He goes (Luke 15:5)!

No wonder the angels praise the LORD on the first Christmas night, as well share God's joy in the salvation of sinners. They rejoice in Heaven (Luke 15:10) even as Jesus brought Heaven's joy down to this sad world. In the same way, God the Father is like the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15:20-24 who cannot contain his joy when he sees his son's return from sin. He runs to him as soon as he spies him coming on the road of repentance back home. Just so the Father "sings loudly" for joy in His work of bringing back lost sheep in Zephaniah 3:17:

The LORD your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.

**Thurs/Fri: Read Luke 2:21-35; Psalm 69:1-4 & 1 Peter 1:10-12****Spirit Sustaining Hope**

The naming of Jesus at His circumcision in Luke 2:21 filled the hearts of Mary and Joseph (as well as the halls of heaven) with great joy. But as the prophet Simeon warns Mary (Luke 2:34-35), those who "would hate Him without a cause" (Psalm 69:4) would cause heart-piercing pain to His mother. Christ was destined His whole life to suffer from both the misery of our lost estate into which He was born and from the hostility of the very people He came to save. Truly, He was a "Man of Sorrows and familiar with grief."

But undeserved suffering was part of the plan as predicted by the prophets of old. In this way, as Hebrews 5:8 puts it, Christ in our nature would "learn obedience" and would qualify Himself to suffer in our nature on the Cross, not because as God He lacked perfection, but because as man, He would earn the right to stand in our place and redeem us by paying for our guilt with His perfect righteousness, forged by living a life of suffering, cries and tears.

These were the sufferings which the prophets of old inquired into (1 Peter 1:10-11) and, for our sakes, wrote about (1 Peter 1:12).

**Meditate and Pray:** Give thanks that the words and deeds of all the prophets in the Old Testament form a unified testimony to the coming glory of the birth of the Christ-child. Even the prophets' imperfections, doubts and fears were used by God to demonstrate to His people that these *merely human prophets* were not the one hoped-for Messiah. Their whole lives were meant to be sign-posts to the future birth of a Savior, their Hope.

**Sat/Sun: Read 2 Kings 4:27 & 4:32-37 & Hebrews 2:14**

**Longing Satisfied, Need Met**

We are meditating upon the Old Testament prophetic longing for the birth of Christ – *not only a longing for the perfectly-timed day of His birth*, but also for the profound pastoral comfort that birth would bring. The saints of old realized that Christ alone could actually, effectively and permanently destroy death, bring eternal life, and defeat Satan. They therefore stood on their prophetic tiptoes looking for that longed-for day to arrive. The best that all the other prophets who preceded Christ could do was groan in hope for Christ's arrival. Even when they did miracles in God's name, they did so in weakness, realizing that someone more mighty to save was urgently needed.

Think of it this way. When Elisha in 2 Kings 4:27 encounters the Shunammite woman, it is hidden from him why this woman is so grief-stricken as to grasp his feet. He is likewise greatly perplexed about how the child's life can return to his body. We see him in 2 Kings 4:34-35 pacing and physically expressing the prayers of his heart by seeking to putting himself (as he prays) in close connection with the dead child's lips, eyes, hands and limbs. When this at first did not work, he again repeated these physically-expressed prayers. This was no magic, but simply the prophet's longing that he, by faith and prayer, could be the God-ordained instrument by which the Lord would send His power to rescue this child from death.

Of course, we know that these physical actions were not the cause of the child's coming back to life, nor was it the status and power of Elisha the man of God that brought resurrection. It was simply his prayer to the Lord, for the Lord alone to have mercy on the dead child (2 Kings 4:33).

**Meditate and Pray:** What, are we to think of Elisha's desperate actions? The following lessons offer rich meditation in the coming week:

- 1) Both Elisha's ignorance of the problem (v 27) and his inability by his own power to reverse the child's death are proofs that this narrative is authentic. Whereas mythological tales that seek to exalt human heroes depict men like Elisha the prophet as "on top of the problem" and able by faith to instantly provide a cure, it is a true testimony to the fact that men like Elijah/Elisha "were people like us" when they stumble and don't know what to do.
- 2) Not even Elisha's staff (the symbol of his authority as a prophet in 2 Kings 4:31) is able to raise the dead. The very one who was able to part the Jordan with the mantle of his prophetic office in his hand (2 Kings 2:14) is absolutely impotent to undo death.
- 3) This is why, in terms of 1 Peter 1:10-12, the prophets earnestly looked to the day when the one God-man, Jesus Christ, would come in great saving power to do what the prophets before Him could not do. Elisha has to pray and beg the Lord to show His power to revive the dead child. But Christ by His own

authoritative word is able to give the command, and the dead rise! Yes, He speaks to the Father before He raises Lazarus (John 11:41-42), but there he prays aloud simply so that the crowds around Him would believe in His connection with His Father.

- 4) Finally, Christ, God in human flesh, is so much more powerful than the prophets who came before Him that even at His moment of greatest weakness, His death, He is able to raise the dead. When Christ gives up His soul and dies (Matthew 27:50-53), the tombs of dead believers are opened so that, after Christ's resurrection on Easter morning, these other revised saints also appeared as living testimonies to Christ's overwhelming power over death!

Thus the hopes and prayers of the prophets like Elijah and Elisha, were answered when Christ came to destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil! (Hebrews 2:14)! Hallelujah!