

SILENT NIGHT

BUT WAS IT SILENT?

It was a night like any other night. The stars were all shining bright. The town of Bethlehem was all abuzz because of the added “tourists” in town. People needed to come back to their ancestor’s origins because of the census that was decreed by Caesar Augustus. The shepherds out in the fields were tending and guarding their sheep as good shepherds do. However, these were not any ordinary shepherds nor were their sheep ordinary sheep. These shepherds were entrusted with watching and tending to the sheep that were to be used for sacrifice one day at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. These shepherds were most likely Levites. That night, throughout all of Israel, everything was as it was every night previous to it. There seemed to be nothing “special” about that night. Ah!!! But we know there was.

There was definitely something special about that night. Something wonderful and glorious was taking place. Unfortunately, no one really knew it. No one was ready for what was about to happen that night. Oh, the religious leaders of that day knew what their scriptures said about Messiah, the one who would come and “save” them from their enemies. But no one was expecting Him to come at that time and on that night. In those days there were “issues” taking place that had captured the Jewish peoples’ attention. These “issues” may have hindered God’s people from being ready and prepared for Messiah’s coming.

One problem was that even though many were looking for Messiah to come, they were looking for Him to come and look like someone who would meet their own expectations of what Messiah should be. Their eyes wanted to see only what they wanted to see. They were blind to what God was about to do and how He was going to do it.

Another problem was that many were caught up in the “political and social” issues of that time concerning the occupation of Israel and Jerusalem by the Romans. Those who were called “zealots” were not really “zealous” about their faith but rather they used their faith and spiritual heritage as a “cover” for their rebellion against those in civil authority.

One more problem was that the Jewish religious leadership were more concerned about their man made traditions and rituals, rather than the established “teachings and instructions” given by God Himself as found in the Torah, Writings and Prophets. This led to schisms in doctrine which led to divisions, or sects, within God’s people. There was rampant corruption and constant “power struggles” within their own religious circles. There were constant underlying personal motives driven by jealousy and envy.

All of the above, to name just a few, and many other “issues,” ultimately caused God’s people to literally fall into a “spiritual slumber.” They became and were “asleep” to the things of God and to the things that He was about to bring forth. They were so concerned with carnal, fleshly and secular issues that they were totally blind to the spiritual “signs” that the Father was trying to get their attention with. They may have said that they were looking forward to and for Messiah’s coming but their hearts were totally on a “different page.”

So, when **THE** time came, to those on earth it may have seemed as if it was just another ordinary day and night but we know that it definitely was anything but ordinary. On the earth it may have seemed as if it was a “silent night” and that “all was calm” but in the spiritual realm there was a tremendous “storm” taking place. Just as lightning pierces the darkness and creates a “thunderous” sound in the natural realm so it was when the “Light of the world” was born. He was the “Light” that pierced through the spiritual darkness that had been hovering over the people. That “Light” born in Bethlehem that day, created a “spiritual thunder” that resonated and resounded throughout all of creation. I believe this “sound” of “thunder” reached the depths of hell as it put every force of wickedness and darkness “on notice.” It echoed in the heavens. It was this “sound” that caused all of Heaven to rejoice.

We read in Luke 2:9-14 (KJV), *“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* As all this was happening, most of the people in Israel were fast asleep in their homes unaware of what was happening right in their midst. Unfortunately, their hearts were also in a “spiritual slumber.”

However, many miles away in the east, there were certain men; we call them "magi," or "wise men," that saw, what the Gospel accounts refer to as a bright "star" in the heavens. We read in the scriptures that they took a two year journey to find this "King of kings" that they believed was heralded by the great "star" in the sky. They came to Herod, in Jerusalem, and asked Him about this King. They were told to go to Bethlehem, for the prophets foretold that it would be in Bethlehem where this "King," the Messiah, would come out of. The "star" again appeared to them. They again followed the "star" and came to a home in Bethlehem, which was not even a day's journey from Jerusalem. There, they found and worshipped the “One” they were seeking after. They found, bowed down and worshipped Jesus, the "King of kings," the Savior of the world.

We all are very familiar with this very true account given to us in the scriptures. I have always wondered about this section of scripture concerning these “wise men,” who were gentiles by the way. The question that had always come to my mind whenever I read this account was, "Why were these men who came from the east, the only ones who saw this "star," this “sign” in the heavens. There are many theologians that have tried to describe what the "star" may have been. Some say it was the "shekinah" glory of God. Some say it was an angel directing their path as they journeyed. Some say it actually was some supernatural phenomena in the night skies with stars, planets and comets. Whatever it was, my question remains the same. Why didn't anyone else see or even notice it?

I believe it was because somewhere in the hearts of these men that came from Persia, there was a stirring. They were men who not only desired truth, but they were men who were seeking and "looking" for the truth and would travel far and wide to find it. After all, they were called "wise men" and true wise men desire to know the truth even if it doesn't always agree with what they think. Wise men are willing to admit that they may be incorrect in their way of seeing and knowing things. These men sought after the true King that this "star" gave witness to. Their hearts were set in seeking after the truth and the true "King of kings."

The Jewish people as a whole may have desired for Messiah to come but were they truly seeking after and looking for Him? Were they truly open to the way that God was going to bring it about or were they too stiff necked in their own thoughts and traditions of how Messiah was to come and what He was to be and look like? Most of the people at that time were looking for a king to come and set them free from the Romans. They were “spiritually blind” to the fact that they really needed a Messiah to come and save them from their sin.

They were asleep to the fact that they were “spiritually separated” from the God they were worshipping. The desire for Messiah may have been in their conversation but was it truly within the hearts? When someone truly desires to know the truth and is truly seeking after the true "King of kings," God will always lead them to Him - even if it takes a "star" (in whatever form it may be). There were a few that we read of in Luke 2 such as Simeon and Anna, the prophetess who were truly watching and waiting for their Messiah. There is always a remnant that God has who are truly seeking His will and not their own. And what did God do? He revealed the Messiah to them – the One they were seeking and yearning for.

Unfortunately, through the accounts given in the Gospels, we read that those who said they were truly God's people and who said that they were looking with great anticipation for Messiah could not and did not see the "star." They were blind to the "sign" that God, the Father, had provided that would have led them to the very One they were so anxiously awaiting. They became "spiritually asleep" to what God was doing.

Jesus makes this same point concerning His return and "second coming" in one of His last parables to His disciples. The parable I am referring to is the "Parable of the Ten Virgins" found in Matthew 25:1-12. In this parable Jesus introduces us to "ten virgins." We read that **all** of the virgins were **slumbering** while awaiting the Bridegroom. We read that five of them were "prepared" with "oil" in their lamps and five were not.

This is symbolic of the "oil of the Holy Spirit" which represents the Holy Spirit's function in the regenerative work of salvation. The ones with the "oil" had a true heart of repentance and their lifestyle reflected the character of Jesus who is the "Light of the world." Jesus calls His disciples to be the "light of the world" as His "ambassadors" until He comes.

The five virgins that had no oil were not prepared to meet with their God. Even though they were with those that were ready, their heart was not one of repentance and their lifestyle was not reflecting the character of God. In other words, they were deceived into thinking that they were ready to meet their God simply because they were with those who were ready. They were waiting for the Bridegroom but yet they were not really ready for Him with the "oil" of the redemptive, regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. This simply meant that they were not truly "saved."

Matthew 25:10 tells us that when the Bridegroom did finally come, those that were "ready and prepared" went in with Him to the "marriage" and then the door was "shut." The other five knocked on the door to try to get in but were told the Bridegroom "knew them not." We also hear that same thing in Matthew 7:25 when many came to the Son of Man declaring all that they had done but yet they were told those same words, "*Depart, for I never knew you.*" Unfortunately, in both scenarios, **they all were "asleep"** to the truth of God's ways and what He truly desires. When **THE** time came, they both were "not known" by Jesus.

Over two thousand years ago at Jesus' first coming, God's people and those who thought they were God's people were "spiritually asleep." Only a few were truly ready and watching. Jesus, in the "Parable of the Ten Virgins" prophesies that it will be the same with those who are His true disciples and those who say and think they are His disciples, yet are not. Again, Jesus tells us that they **all** will be "asleep."

In Matthew 25:13, Jesus goes on to declare the main point of Him giving the "Parable of the Ten Virgins." He states, "**Watch** therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." In all of the Gospel accounts combined, we read of Jesus constantly and consistently, in one way or another, urging and imploring His disciples to always "watch, pray and be ready." The same is true for His disciples today. It is time for the "slumbering" Body of Christ to "awaken." God is giving us many "signs" of the soon return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Messiah. He is "sounding the shofar" in many ways these days so that we awaken from our "slumber." Unfortunately, many will stay asleep or even fall away because the events that come forth will not "line up" with their "theology" of how it should look like upon Jesus' return.

The questions we need to ask ourselves are the same questions those at Jesus' first coming needed to ask themselves but did not. Will we be willing to admit that we may be incorrect in some of our ways of thinking? Will we be too consumed with the political and social issues of our day that we may find ourselves blinded to what God is doing or wants to do in this hour? Will we be too wrapped up in our own "turf wars" and "religious power struggles" within the local Body of Christ, as well as the Body of Christ as a whole? Are we losing focus on the fundamental truths of the Gospel message (Christ crucified; Christ has risen; Christ will come again). Will we allow our man made "Christian" traditions and rituals cause divisions and strife within the Body of Christ? Will we allow ourselves to be teachable and thereby willing to receive and act upon the correction given to us by the Holy Spirit concerning any or all of the above?

Many of us are so steeped in our own traditions concerning Jesus' return that we may not be ready – just as the five foolish virgins were not ready. We may miss the “signs” that point to the return of the Son of Man. Jesus expressed what the signs of His second coming would be. He told His disciples when they had asked Him what these “signs” would be. He was very clear and concise. I encourage you to read Matthew 24 and Mark 13. You will also notice that at the conclusion of each of those times of teaching by Jesus concerning the end times and His return that He emphatically states, “Watch.” (Matthew 24:42 and Mark 13:35-37)

On that first “Christmas Day” it may have seemed as if it was just another ordinary day. We know that it definitely was not. Many were “spiritually asleep” to what God was about to do. It may have seemed “silent” and “calm to many but it was anything but in the spirit realm. There was a “sound,” a spiritual sound” that resounded and resonated throughout Heaven, earth and down into the depths of hell. “Hark,” the herald angels declared and decreed, “Glory to the newborn King.”

So shall it will be upon Jesus' second coming. It may seem like another ordinary day. Many will not be ready because Jesus may come at a time that does not line up with their own expectations of when Messiah should come. Therefore, they would not be “watching.” Many will be caught up in the political and social issues of the day and put the watching and being ready for Jesus to come, “on the back burner” of their priorities. Many will be so involved with their doctrines, traditions, jealousy and envy as well as “religious battles” and “power struggles” within the Body of Christ causing them to be so consumed with these things they neglect to “watch and be ready” for Jesus' return.

When that time comes it may seem as if the “night is silent and that all is calm.” Will this false security of “silence and calm” lull the Body of Christ into a “spiritual slumber?” The very same “sleep” that Jesus prophesied in the “Parable of the Ten Virgins?” The good news is that I believe the Lord is trying to get our attention, just as He was prior to Jesus' first appearance. But will we have ears to hear the “spirit sound of thunder” that will be resonating in the darkness? Will we chose to have eyes to see what God is doing in this hour? On **THAT** day there will be a “sound” that resounds throughout all creation. The angels will again declare to the four corners of the earth that Messiah is coming – for the second time.

There is a saying that we hear during the Christmas season that states, "Wise men still seek Him." The "magi" ("wise" because they were seeking after truth) were led by the "star" (whatever it may have been) to Israel and to people that should have been able to see the "star" if they were seeking after the true "Light of the World." After all, it was foretold to them. Jesus came for them. He was the fulfillment of their scriptures. However, they were oblivious. I pray that “history does not repeat itself.”

In this season in which we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Messiah, it is our prayer that we who have received and believed the Good News concerning Jesus, may never become "oblivious" and fall into a “spiritual slumber” to the signs of the second advent of our King – Jesus. I encourage each of us to look deep within ourselves with complete honesty to be assured that you or I would not be as the five virgins who thought all was well but found out too late that they were just deceiving themselves and were not prepared and ready for when our Bridegroom returns.

May you all experience true "peace" through an intimate relationship with "Abba, Father," Jesus, the "Lover of our soul," and may you walk in the fullness of that relationship through a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” - John 3:16 (KJV)

From our family to yours, "A Blessed Christmas"
God Bless you, Ray and Trish