

inclination to command, "Get thee behind me Satan—and push."

But let it be remembered that when you start fighting out of the corner, do not fight yourself. That is the way of many of us. Most of the wounds are inflicted on ourselves. We are our worst enemies. But even worse still, do not fight the people who are trying to help you get out of your corner. For instance, the preachers who stick their necks out every Lord's Day to warn, encourage, threaten, enlighten, direct . . . and all this to help you make of life, not a corner, but a spacious dwelling. Why build up a mental resentment toward those who would kindly help you out? Aim and land your blows on the devil and his kind who are dedicated to the job of keeping you in the corner.

God will make a door if you learn to trust Him. In the valley of Achor there is always one trail that leads out.

Lastly, I suggest one difficult angle to it: If you must stay in your corner, then make of it a chapel wherein God can share it with you. Convert the stumbling block into a stepping stone . . . such is what the Bible means by grace. "My grace is sufficient for you . . . for strength is made perfect through weakness." This is the only attitude in which life's thorns can be born without sourness. Just try it! The same heat that causes a cut flower to wilt, causes a roofed flower to grow. Friends, even now God stands facing you as millions crouch in their corners. He is saying, "Give me your hand in simple trust and I will lead you out."

THE GUIDING LIGHT

December 22, 1957

Galatians 4:1-7

"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform . . . He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines, of never-failing skill He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will."¹ Yes, most of God's movements are characterized by supreme and inspiring mystery; yet, when we look backwards, we readily see a meaningful pattern. Perhaps no mystery is more compounded than the birth of Jesus Christ. Its time, place, manner, and method are far from the way any human would have ordered them. Let us look at a part of this mystery as equipping inspiration for Christmas, 1957.

BORN IN SUCH A PLACE

That Christ should have been born in such a *place* as Bethlehem in Palestine seems like a poor choice, doesn't it? Pales-

tine—that barren little country where eighty-six per cent of the land is either devoid of topsoil or is barren mountainsides; where six months of the year it is broiling hot and parched dry; where every drop of drinking water is prized highly. All the productive soil combined would hardly equal a county seat in the average state in America. If the modern tourist trade were denied Palestine today and the military spending stopped, once again the gnawing pains of poverty would be felt as they were twenty centuries ago. Its location is neither in Europe nor Asia . . . but in an "in between" section which has placed it at the crossroads of every army that moved from Egypt across the fertile crescent into Babylon, Persia, or farther east. What a place for the Son of God to be born!

In fancy one wonders why God did not choose some beautiful place on earth . . . some near Eden environment for the Saviour's advent. Why not the beautiful rolling plains of the west, or the magnolia scented Southland? Why not the uplands of mountain vista—the immaculately clean Alps—or the mysterious and subtle beauty of China or the Far East? Why a desolate, out-of-the-way, insignificant, little hamlet like Bethlehem? What a mystery!

¹William Cowper; "God Moves In A Mysterious Way"; *The World's Great Religious Poetry*; Edited by C. M. Hill; p. 181; MacMillian Company: New York; 1938.

Maybe one of God's reasons was that the place—like His life—was to run counter to man's system of values. Since Jesus was to live and die for the lowly as well as the man of rank and station, then His beginning was to be in keeping with His message and mission in life. Perhaps this is God's way of saying that geography means relatively nothing in His providential plan: that the most out-of-way place on earth where one lives or works can become a manger of Christ's indwelling. Such a truth can transform the most undesirable flat into a mansion, an eroded farm into a plantation, a third-floor apartment into a penthouse, because, you see, it is not where one lives that matters half so much as the quality of life that is brought into the place. Turning a klieg light of worth on the darkest ally will illuminate it into a residence wherein God can dwell. If Christ can come to a place like Palestine, He can come anywhere and still feel at home.

Such was the conviction of a French farmer who bought a marble bust of Beethoven and placed it on a block in the back yard of his farm. Neighbors reasoned, "My, what bad taste . . . to put a work of art in a barnyard? Put it in an art gallery where it belongs." Said the farmer, "Why not have something of real value, something truly great among all the drabness of a barnyard?" He was exactly right. Why shouldn't the drab routine of a man who plants, digs, and hoes be relieved by something bright and beautiful? Far more conspicuous than a bust of Beethoven in a barnyard was the presence of that young child in Bethlehem's manger among the drabness of lives that had lost their lustre in association with the world.

What a mystery that God should ordain his being born in a stable! Why not some fancy boudoir, some hallowed spot fit for a King? Recall the birth of young Charles of Britain: how that event was accompanied by much fanfare, elaborate arrangements for christening, wealthy gifts, special plans becoming the birth of a young prince. Yet, the birth of the Prince of Peace didn't even make the local Jerusalem newspaper. Born on straw in the manger of cattle, in a hollow cave . . . just another boy. That a mystery!

Moreover, it seems like a mystery that Christ was born at such a time as that year 4 or 5 B. C. The little country Palestine was divided into several political groups . . . sliced up to produce a maximum of taxation, taxes that were oppressive. Herod, that selfish despot, who was willing to murder his own son and daughters, held the reigns of government. The humble man of the street had no mind for spiritual things . . . his energies were exhausted in the pursuit of meat and bread. While no major wars were being waged still blood flowed from minor skirmishes from neighborhood feuds.

Jews were set against Gentiles, class against class, creed against creed. Women had no status and children had little chance unless they were males. The rich got richer, and the poor got poorer. Slavery was accepted as the thing to do; oppression rode like a wild steed through the lives of great majorities. Religion faltered at legalism and hairsplitting, petty minor issues. What a strange time for the Saviour's advent!

And yet, that is the time when it happened. How does one explain it? The Apostle Paul hit the nail on the head when he said, "In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son into the world." Which means, when God got ready, it happened. This fullness was God's time . . . not man's . . . a lesson of value to us. God's calendar does not have to be timed to ours. We have a way of setting up our little programs, timetables, monthly schedules, and then invoking God's blessing or them as though to say, "Lord, this is the way we want it, and that makes it the best way and time. Let it work out this way and in this time."

Much of our distraction and anxieties are explained on such a basis. God's supreme design may have little or nothing to do with man's calendars and barometers. The day one says: "They will be done," he must remember that then and there he is yielding to God's time and manner.

Many a time I have wondered why Jesus didn't come earlier . . . why not in

the day of Moses, or during the reign of some minor judge when the life of the people was at low ebb? The world lay in spiritual darkness and sin for thousands of centuries . . . without a Saviour. Was God tardy in releasing His son? One must admit that God alone can see all time from the standpoint of eternity . . . and He knows what is best and when.

BORN TO SUCH PEOPLE

The third mystery is that Jesus should be born to such people. Why the Jews? They surely were not the oldest people, nor the biggest nation. Their standing in the world was far from desirable, being either envied or despised by many other nations. Were they more religious than others? Hardly! Why did He not come, say, to the Babylonians with all their ancient culture of art, literature, astrology, and theology? Theirs was a fine heritage—was it not a proper people of the Saviour's heritage?

Why not the Greeks, that fine group who gave the world its beautiful, universal language, its symmetrical architecture, its philosophers and detachment? Would not Aristotle, Diogenes, Phthogaras have been worthy antecedents to the Messiah?

Why not a Roman? Those orderly masters of construction, law, systemized government, and the builders of the "eternal city". Wasn't the Latin personality an asset to the world's cultures?

Jesus was born among the Jews because they alone had given to the world monotheistic religion . . . that is, a one God

religion. Theirs was the time-defying Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is *One* God." Other religions made places for many gods . . . dividing man's allegiance and holding him down to earthen idols. But Judaism insisting that God is a Spirit . . . that righteousness is His nature. This was the religious climate for Jesus Christ. God had to reveal Himself through that kind of folks . . . all of their weaknesses notwithstanding. A strange people indeed; yet, God became one of them.

They were not Judean Jews . . . the cultured, well-informed, nor for that matter scholarly Jews of great prestige, but the humble Galileans who represent the great majorities of the world. Jesus was born among the unsung—knowing that such identity would place Him on the level with most of the human race. This is why no person on the face of the earth should feel excluded from the fold of Christ's redeeming love.

On the 22nd and 23rd of December, the days are almost exactly the same length, but on the 25th of December, the days begin to lengthen . . . as though some strange hand took scissors and plucked a lock of hair from the head of time and put it on the forehead of days. The longer days point to eventual warmth of spring and summer. Just so in the life of man: the birth of Jesus lengthened man's hope, gave rise to his salvation, pointed toward the springtime of meaningful existence with God here and hereafter.

May the Spirit of the living God be born in the manger of your hearts this Christmas in the year of our Lord, 1957.

OMEGA

December 29, 1957

Farewell and finalities often have a note of pathos, and they sometimes leave us with a sense of sadness. We have come to the end of this year: a year of surprises, tragedies, guided missiles, earthquakes, tornadoes, bayonets, racial strife, prosperity, poverty . . . and some have come to death. But all of these are now wrapped up in the package called the old year. It seems that the one timely question about it all should be: "Has this year brought us closer to God?" The amount

of money made, or real estate acquired, teapot battles are relatively inconsequential compared to this important question.

This was the year begun by good intentions on part of many of us. January found the conscience twinged by dislike for the old self and a new scrubbing of the walls and floors of morals. The months and weeks rolled by and many good intentions were translated into deeds. About these we felt a sense of nobility in ac-