

THE CHRIST OF
Christmas

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

Foreword by Linda Boice



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JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE



P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

MY HUSBAND Jim Boice loved Christmas. He loved everything about the Christmas season. For him celebrating Christmas was an expression of the joy every Christian should feel in remembering Jesus Christ's coming into the world to be our Savior. Jim knew that that was indeed something to celebrate.

He loved all the traditions of the Advent season. He would go caroling in our center-city neighborhood with members of Tenth Presbyterian Church, and enthusiastically supported the special programs presented by the children of the Sunday school. I cannot remember that he ever grumbled about commercialism; in fact, it was about the only time of the year when he shopped. No one was more the opposite of Dickens' character Scrooge than Jim was.

He threw himself into the yearly preparations, both at home and at Tenth. He and our three girls would choose our tree and then decorate it and the rest of the old manse and, later, our smaller house near the church in downtown Philadelphia. He loved the arrival of the towering spruce or fir in the sanctuary of Tenth that would fill one entire side of the platform, with no decorations except a small white or crimson bird placed high overhead on a branch.

For both of us, the high point of the season was the Christmas Eve service at Tenth Church. When we came there in 1968 there was no such service. A year or two after our arrival, however, an English friend came to Philadelphia to be Jim's secretary and was appalled that Tenth Church did not celebrate the birth of the Savior on December 24th or 25th. Jim gave this some thought and decided that Tenth should have a service, one early enough in the evening for families with young children. With the Session's approval that service was instituted, and it included candlelight, carefully chosen choir anthems, the reading of related Old and New Testament passages, and the full-throated singing of many beloved carols by the entire congregation. Over the years this service has grown, and now both members and non-members crowd the sanctuary.

But Jim especially cared about the Sunday services—that the hymns, special music, and messages would all help his congregation understand better and see afresh the glory of the Christmas story. He gave special effort to preparing clear, insightful sermons that would not be a rehash of old and tired material. The chapters in this volume have been developed from that hard work and prayerful preparation.

Jim's love of Christmas—which included, after hot chocolate and before the stockings were hung, reading with his family the wonderful birth account in Luke 2—was truly an expression of his joy and thankfulness for what God had done when He sent His son into the world to be Immanuel, the Savior of His people. The angels rejoiced at the time of Jesus' birth, and Jim felt that we, too, must rejoice and celebrate God's "indefinable gift."

Linda M. Boice
June 2009

PREFACE

OVER THE YEARS, it has been my privilege as a pastor preaching at the normal worship services of a local church to come repeatedly to the Christmas season and explore the Christmas story in a variety of ways. I confess that at times I have approached this task reluctantly, particularly in later years. I have wondered, having preached so many sermons on Luke 2, Matthew 2, and related “Christmas” passages, if I was going to be able to find anything new or even interesting for a congregation that has known those texts from childhood. But I have never been disappointed. I have always found the texts to speak in fresh ways first to me and then also, I hope, to the congregation.

The emphases I have found are not those normally associated with the Christmas accounts. Usually people think of Christmas in sentimental terms, focusing on the frailty of the baby or the beauties of motherhood. I have found the stories to be powerful and not at all sentimental.

The chief emphasis, as in all truly Christian theology, is on the deity of Christ—and the reason for which He came into the world on that first Christmas. Matthew identifies Jesus as “Immanuel . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He shows

how the wise men “worshiped” when they finally found Him (Matthew 2:11). Luke describes the mission of John the Baptist as preparing people “for the Lord” (Luke 1:17, 76). The angel who speaks to Mary calls Jesus “the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32), explaining how He is to be fathered by God’s Holy Spirit (v. 35). Later, in the second chapter, the shepherds are pointed to one who is “a Savior,” even “Christ the Lord” (v. 11). Simeon called Him God’s salvation; “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32). If the babe of Christmas is God (“God with us”), then Christmas takes us back to Christ’s pre-existence as the second Person of the Godhead, from all eternity, and forward to His work of salvation on the cross, His resurrection, and beyond. A theme like that is inexhaustible.

The second unique emphasis I have found in these stories is their concentration upon what I have called “the little people of Christmas.” That is, there is very little weight given to the so-called important people of this world, like Caesar Augustus, Herod, the religious leaders of the day, or other leaders. Some of those come into the story indirectly, and others appear later in relationship to Christ and His ministry. But in this story the emphasis is upon “little people” like Joseph and Mary, the shepherds (who are not even named), Simeon, Anna, Zechariah, and Elizabeth. Even the wise men were not particularly important in terms of Jewish culture, for they were Gentiles, who were often assumed to have no part in Israel’s spiritual blessings.

This second emphasis brings the Christmas story down to us, for most of us are not important in this world’s eyes either. The story tells us that Jesus is for people like ourselves.

In putting this collection of Christmas messages in book form, I need to acknowledge that they have already been preached at Tenth Presbyterian Church—in Christmas seasons stretching from 1969 to 1982. Most have also appeared on the international radio program, “The Bible Study Hour,” over roughly the same span of years. On occasion I have used one or a combination in addresses to various church and civic groups.

I know that the congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church, which supports me in my many writing projects, joins me in praying that these studies might be a spiritual blessing to those who read them. I know they have been a blessing to me in my preparation. I wish to thank my secretary, Caecilie M. Foelster, for her effort and expertise in typing the manuscript and verifying the Scripture references.

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).



CHRIST
AND
CHRISTMAS

I



THE CHRISTMAS STORY ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST

HAVE YOU EVER read the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ? I do not mean the Christmas story according to Luke, which we know so well, or Matthew, which we also know, or even the apostle John, but the Christmas story from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself.

If we could meet the great personages of the Christmas story and interrogate them one by one, the story from each would be beautiful and stirring. Mary would have an account of the appearance of the angel, her trip to visit Elizabeth, the birth itself, the visit of the shepherds. Probably the early

chapters of Luke give an account of those things as Mary herself told them. If we called the shepherds, they would be able to give us many details not in the biblical narrative, perhaps a description of the angels or the result of their later testimony to other people. Joseph would have his story. Yet having gone through all that interrogation, we would still want to hear from our Lord.

Where are we going to find that story? We do not have it in the gospels. The Lord's own story is in the Old Testament, in the fortieth psalm—and in the New Testament, which repeats these words in Hebrews:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the
scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.’”

(Hebrews 10:5–7)

That is what I call the Christmas story according to the Lord Jesus Christ.

BORN TO DIE

What is it that our Lord emphasizes in these verses? First, that He came into the world for a purpose. That is important,

for it is uniquely true of Him. It cannot be said of any other person that he or she came into the world to do something. It is often true that there are purposes *parents* have for their children. They hope that the child lying in a crib will grow up to do something significant in this world. If the parents are Christians, they want their child to be kept from sin and be able to serve Jesus Christ. Parents have those and other aspirations. But the child does not have them. The child has to acquire them. That is why, from a Christian perspective, the child must be taught its destiny from the pages of the Word of God.

But Jesus was different. Our Lord says that He came (and was conscious of coming) for a specific purpose. Moreover, He spells that purpose out: “I have come *to do your will, O God.*”

What was that will? God willed Christ to be our Savior.

I do not know why it is, but we often lose a sense of that purpose in telling the Christmas story. We focus so much on the birth of the baby and on the sentiment that goes with that story—and there is a certain amount of legitimate sentimentality that goes with it—that we miss the most important things. Actually, the story is treated quite simply in Scripture, and the emphasis is always on the fact that Jesus came to die. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took a human body in order that He might die for our salvation. When our Lord speaks of His coming it is therefore highly understandable that He is thinking along those lines.

In the tenth chapter of Hebrews the author contrasts the sacrifices that took place in Israel before the coming of Christ—the sin offerings and burnt offerings, by which believers testified of their faith that God would accept them on the

basis of the death of an innocent substitute—with Christ’s great and perfect sacrifice. It is in the context of that contrast, between the former things and that which has now come, between the shadow and the reality, that he brings in the quotation from Psalm 40. The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with a purpose, and that purpose was to do God’s will: to be our Savior. We miss the most important thing about Christmas if we fail to see that.

WHO CAN PAY?

A second point emerges from these verses. It is not only that our Lord came into the world with a sense of purpose; He also came into the world with knowledge that He was the perfect one to fulfill that purpose.

It is possible to have a noble purpose and yet not be the one to fulfill it. We see that many times when we talk to children. They are aware of what they want to do, but often they cannot quite do it. They will say, “Here, let me do it! I can do it!” But they cannot do it, and after they have struggled a bit—wise parents let them struggle—they must be helped to fulfill the task. That was not the case with Jesus Christ. As He came into the world, our Lord had His mind on His great purpose: to provide salvation for the race. But not only did He have the purpose in mind, He also was aware that He was the one perfectly suited to carry out that purpose. He was perfectly suited by virtue of who He was. Unlike anybody else who has ever been born, He was not only man; He was God as well. Therefore while as a man He could die

upon the cross, as God He died in order to pay the infinite price necessary for our salvation.

Harry Ironside used to tell about a young man who was a soldier in the Russian army. Because the young man's father was a friend of Czar Nicholas I, the young man had been given a rather responsible post. He was paymaster in one of the barracks for the Russian army, and it was his responsibility to see that the right amount of money was distributed each month to the soldiers. The young man meant well, but his character was not up to his responsibility. He took to gambling. Eventually he had gambled away a great deal of the government's money as well as all his own.

In due course the young man received notice that a representative of the czar was coming to check the accounts, and he knew that he was in trouble. That evening he got out the books and totaled up the funds owed. Then he went to the safe and got out his own pitifully small amount of money. As he sat there and looked at the two he was overwhelmed at the astronomical debt versus his own small change. He was ruined! He knew he would be disgraced. At last the young man determined to take his life. He pulled out his revolver, placed it on the table before him, and wrote a summation of his misdeeds. At the bottom of the ledger, where he had totaled up his illegal borrowings, he wrote: "A great debt! Who can pay?" He decided that at the stroke of midnight he would die.

As the evening wore on the young soldier grew drowsy and eventually fell asleep. That night Czar Nicholas I, as was sometimes his custom, was making the rounds of this particular barracks. Seeing a light, he stopped, looked in, and

saw the young man asleep. He recognized him immediately and, looking over his shoulder, saw the ledger book and realized all that had taken place. He was about to awaken him and put him under arrest when his eye fastened on the young man's message: "A great debt! Who can pay?" Suddenly, with a surge of magnanimity he reached over, wrote one word at the bottom of the ledger, and slipped out.

The young man was sleeping fitfully. He awoke suddenly in the middle of the night, glanced at the clock and, realizing that it was long after midnight, reached for his revolver to shoot himself. But as he did so his eye fell upon the ledger. He saw something that he had not seen before. There was his writing: "A great debt! Who can pay?" But underneath it was the word the czar had written: "Nicholas."

He was dumbfounded. He did not understand how it could have got there. There must be some mistake. He went to the safe where material that bore the signature of the czar was on file. It was the czar's signature. He said to himself, "The czar must have come by when I was asleep. He has seen the book. He knows all. Still he is willing to forgive me." The young soldier then rested on the word of the czar, and the next morning a messenger came from the palace with exactly the amount needed to meet the deficit. Only the czar could pay, and the czar did pay.¹

In the same way only the Lord Jesus Christ was able to pay our debt to God. We look at the moral requirement of God's righteousness spelled out in His law. We compare it with our own tawdry performance, and we ask the question: "A great debt to God! Who can pay?" But then the Lord Jesus

1. H. A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1945), pp. 67-69.

Christ steps forward and signs His name to our ledger: “Jesus Christ.” Only Jesus can pay, and He does.

JOY UNSPEAKABLE

The third thing in this text is that Jesus was delighted to do the Father’s will. That very word is in some of our versions. It is certainly in the fortieth psalm. We find in many places in Scripture that the Lord was *satisfied* in His ministry. The twenty-second psalm describes His death by crucifixion, and toward the end of that psalm He is praising God. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah perhaps better than any other Old Testament passage spells out the theme of vicarious atonement, the death of one on behalf of the many. At the end of that chapter we find Jesus looking upon the travail of His soul and saying, “I am ‘satisfied’” (Isaiah 53:11). Hebrews 10:5–7 tells us He actually *delighted* to do the will of God.

Could Jesus be delighted to come to this earth from glory, to lay aside all the privileges and prerogatives He had enjoyed as the eternal Son of God, to take to Himself a human form, to become like us, to become poor, to suffer throughout life, and then eventually to suffer upon the cross and die the death of a sinner, a malefactor, an evildoer? Yes, Jesus delighted in that, because it was His pleasure to do the Father’s will to achieve our salvation.

Imagine a person who sees something to be done and recognizes that he or she is the one to do it, but then either does not do it or does it reluctantly. The person says, “Well,

I suppose it has to be done, and I guess I'm the only one able to do it. Nobody else will do it if I don't. So, all right, I'll do it." The work is done, but there was no joy in it. I am glad our Lord did not think like that. Our Lord did not say, "Well, Father, I suppose that if this is what You want and if You haven't got anybody else, I'll go die." It was not like that at all. Jesus delighted to do the Father's will. It was His joy to bring the sons and daughters of God into glory.

Is it any wonder that the angels were joyful as they announced the coming of that one who was to be the Savior?

We too should be joyful, not because we give gifts to one another, not because there is a certain lightheartedness or Christmas spirit in the world at large, not because there is a pretty story that is nice to tell children, but because Jesus Christ was joyful as He came into the world to be our Savior. If He was joyful, we should be joyful as well.

"I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS"

There is one more thing to notice. When the Lord says, "Here I am," He is speaking in the present tense, which is undoubtedly intended to make this important point: "I have come; but not only have I come, I have come never to depart again."

Edmund P. Clowney, the former president of Westminster Theological Seminary, had been speaking about Christ to some individual. The person said, "The problem I have with Christianity is that it all happened so long ago. You're talking about something that happened two thousand years

ago. If Christ had only been born, say, a hundred years ago, it would be different.” Dr. Clowney’s response was the correct one. He said, “Those events that happened so long ago have not ceased to be current. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came then, comes again and again through the person of His Holy Spirit to bring the accomplishment of His salvation to the individual.”

That is the reason the Christmas story is alive. It is the only reason it has the hold it has upon so many millions of people.

If the story were a fable or even an event that merely had happened 2,000 years ago (or even 100 years ago) and then ended, it would have no hold upon us. What does it really matter that somebody died long ago in a far-off land? I have my problems. You have your problems. So what? But if the One who came then still comes, if He comes to the individual through His Spirit to bring the results of the salvation He accomplished 2,000 years ago to where you and I stand and act now, then this story lives and enables us to live also.

Have you found the Lord Jesus Christ, who came at Christmas, to be your Savior? Have you placed your trust in Him? He has come. He can be yours in this moment. Phillips Brooks, in his carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” has a stanza that is a delight at this point.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv’n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heav’n.

CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS

No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

So He does! May this be your experience at this Christmas season.

2



WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

THE FIRST CHAPTER of Matthew begins with a genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ followed immediately by an account of His birth. With the exception of that genealogy, the first words of the entire New Testament are these: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18).

What a remarkable beginning to the account of Jesus’ life! There is no doubt that Jesus was a man. The listing of His genealogy is itself ample proof of that; He was descended from Abraham through Abraham’s great descendant King David. Jesus was as human as we are.

Yet if those words are true, as we obviously are to believe they are, then something more needs to be said. Matthew is speaking of a man, but of a man born without benefit of a human father. The male part in the conception of Jesus was taken over by the Holy Spirit of God. No one in the whole history of the human race was conceived that way. Yet here is Matthew speaking of one who was as distinguished from us by the beginning of His earthly life as we know He also was by the end.

Who is Jesus Christ?

What child is this, who, laid to rest,

On Mary's lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,

While shepherds watch are keeping?

Where are we to go for an answer? Should we ask the theologians? They will not help us much, for they disagree on their answers, as we know. Some have a divine Jesus, some a merely human one. Some speak of "*the myth* of God incarnate." Once I heard J. I. Packer of Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, pray, "O Lord, deliver us from theological notions." I said "amen" to that, for notions are precisely what many theological opinions are. They are like the "notions" counter in a department store—random collections of more or less whimsical objects—and not nearly as lasting.

Shall we go to the Pharisees or scribes of the Christmas story? Shall we ask Herod? Those are mere men, no better (and perhaps less) informed than our contemporary theologians. Let us be done with these lesser personages and

turn to those who ought to know and who, in fact, appear in the Christmas story for the express purpose of answering our question.

THE ANGEL GABRIEL

Gabriel, the angel of God, appears at least twice in the Christmas story, once to announce the birth of John the Baptist to John's father, the aged Zechariah, and once to announce the birth of Jesus to Mary. It is the second annunciation that bears on our question, for, having appeared to Mary and having greeted her as one "highly favored" of the Lord, the angel went on to say, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30–33).

Each of those pronouncements must have struck the young virgin as remarkable. It was remarkable that her son would be great, she being of humble origins. It was remarkable that He would reign on the throne of David forever. Everyone knew that God had promised David that he would have an heir to reign on his throne forever; but that had not yet happened. In Mary's day the house of David had been cast down, and foreigners ruled the land. If Gabriel was right in telling Mary that her son would reign on David's throne, the long waiting of the Jewish people was now over and their Messiah had come. Mary's future child was that Messiah. All that was

remarkable. But those were not the most remarkable parts of Gabriel's greeting. The most astonishing thing was that the child was to be "the Son of the Most High."

Were it not for the context, a person might be inclined to take this in a minimal sense, that is, as speaking of one merely chosen by God to fulfill a special task. It was used of Israel in just that way (Psalm 82:6; Jeremiah 31:20). It was used of the kings (2 Samuel 7:14). In this case, however, the context has to do with the conception of Mary's child without a human father. His Father would be God Himself, for He would be "the Son of the Most High." In other words, the child was to be God's offspring in a way no other person either before or since has been.

If we had only the context of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, the promise would be remarkable enough. But that is not our only context. We also have the whole of the New Testament in which this title is picked up and explained.

We think of Peter's confession of Christ. Jesus had asked the disciples who they thought He was, and Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). This was no mere earthly sonship, for Jesus indicated that Peter's insight was so remarkable that it had come not from Peter's own powers of observation, but by revelation from God: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (v. 17). By the illumination of God, Peter had perceived that Jesus was no mere man but very God. He was God incarnate.

We find the fullest New Testament treatment in 1 John. The Christians to whom John wrote had been shaken by teach-

ers who claimed to be believers who were denying that Jesus was “God . . . come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2–3). They were troubled by those denials, and John wrote to them to assure them that they, rather than the false teachers, were actually God’s children. The false teachers are of Antichrist, who always denies Christ’s divinity, John says. Christians can know they are of God by their conviction that Jesus is indeed God’s Son. John puts it in formula form: “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us” (1 John 4:15–16). “Jesus is the Son of God” becomes the confession by which one can tell whether or not one is actually a Christian.

When Gabriel told Mary that the future child would be “the Son of the Most High,” he was saying that the child would be God.

JOSEPH’S ANGEL

The angel who appeared to Joseph is described in Matthew 1:18–24. This angel may have been Gabriel, but he is not named. He is only “an angel” who appears to say, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

This revelation is similar to the revelation to Mary, for the title *Jesus*, just as *Son of God*, has a general and human as well as a specific and divine application. *Jesus* means “Jehovah is salvation,” or “Jehovah saves.” It is a testimony to the truth

that salvation is of the Lord (cf. Jonah 2:9). This appellation was used by many people. *Joshua* is a variant of the same name, for example. But that cannot be the full meaning of the name in Matthew 1:21, for here the angel is explaining the virgin conception of Christ. That is, the name is in part an explanation of what is happening. It is a case of God at work. Moreover, immediately after giving the child the name *Jesus*, meaning “Jehovah saves,” the angel goes on to say in reference to the child, “He will save his people from their sins.” In other words, “He [the child] is Jehovah.”

This revelation to Joseph is confirmed by Matthew as he continues the narration, for he says that it happened to fulfill what God had prophesied through Isaiah: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14), which means, as Matthew points out, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

THE SHEPHERDS’ ANGEL

If anyone should know who Mary’s child is, it is certainly the angels, God’s messengers. An angel appeared to the shepherds as they were watching their sheep in the fields surrounding Bethlehem. This angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11).

This is one of the most significant texts in the New Testament, for through a small grammatical detail (directed by the Holy Spirit, who inspired the biblical writers) two

words give the fullest possible testimony to Jesus' divinity. When the angel said to the shepherds that the child who had been born in Bethlehem was "Christ the Lord," the Greek words read *Christos kyrios*. The ending of both words is masculine and in the nominative case, thus making the words equivalents. If instead of this we had read *Christos kyriou*, which is a very common way of writing—that is, with the first word in the nominative case and the second in the genitive—the phrase would mean "the Lord's Christ." This would be an appropriate way to refer to anyone anointed to a special task in Israel as God's prophet, priest, or king. David would be "the Lord's Christ," for example. But that is not what the phrase says. Instead of reading "the Lord's Christ," we actually read, "Christ the Lord," which means "Christ, *who is* the Lord."

The sentence means that He, who by this time had already been born of Mary, was not merely the anointed one of God but was actually God now manifest in human form.

Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that the child was to be *God's Son*. The angel who appeared to Joseph said that He would be *Jehovah who saves*. The angel who told the shepherds of Christ's birth called Him *the Lord*. Three angels! Three testimonies! And the testimonies agree that Jesus is God.

G O D T H E F A T H E R

There is one more person we want to ask about this matter, and that is the Father Himself. We can imagine a case in which the parentage of a child is disputed and the question is

therefore finally put to the alleged father, “Are you the father of this child?” Jesus has been declared to be the unique child of God by three appearances of an angel. We are inclined to believe angels, though in such a case we might find the word of mere human beings questionable. But what of the Father? What does He say? Does He acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as His Son?

That direct word is not given in the Christmas story, though everything in it may be said rightly to have come to us from God. Instead we have to wait for thirty years, until the Lord began His ministry.

After the events of those early years, which included the murder of the innocents and the flight into Egypt, Jesus was brought back to Nazareth, where He lived in Joseph’s home and presumably learned Joseph’s trade. He grew to manhood “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). One day He appeared at the Jordan River, where His cousin John had been preaching and baptizing. He presented Himself for baptism, which John was reluctant to do. John said, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Matthew 3:14). Jesus said that it was proper for him to do this since He had come to “fulfill all righteousness.”

So John baptized Jesus. As Jesus came up out of the water, at that moment heaven was opened, the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Him, and a voice from heaven was heard saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (v. 17). *This is My Son!* It was the voice of God, God’s testimony. The angels had announced this truth; now the Father Himself confirmed it. In the mouth of two or three

witnesses, and those of the greatest and most trustworthy character, Jesus' sonship was established.

OUR TESTIMONY

Only one thing remains: not to seek for further witnesses, but meekly to add our confession to God's own. Is this child of Christmas God's Son? Is He God with us? Then let us acknowledge Him as such. Let us worship Him and show by the obedience of our lives that He is indeed who He is declared so clearly to be.

Thomas did it. There was a time when Thomas was not certain of his confession. Early in Christ's ministry, when He had chosen His disciples and had set about to preach the ways of God's kingdom, Thomas had believed in Jesus. He would have echoed Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). But things did not go as Thomas had expected, and the day came when Jesus was crucified, an outcome totally unexpected by Thomas. His world was shattered. Therefore, three days later when someone said that Jesus had been raised from the dead, Thomas would not believe it. At this point in his life Thomas would have given his creed in four words, "Dead men don't rise." But Jesus had risen, whether Thomas believed it or not, and the day came when Jesus appeared to Thomas himself. Jesus presented Himself for examination, and Thomas, who a moment before had been an utter skeptic, fell down before Him, confessing, "My Lord and My God!" (John 20:28).