

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

Volume 1 Number 11

December 1999

Dispelling Myths of Christ's Birth and Childhood

By Mario Seiglie

Page 3



How did December 25th come to be celebrated as the date of Christ's birth? Over the years, many legends have sprung up about Christ's birth and childhood. What does the Bible say about these events?

I Hated You, Coach Ioveno

By Lenny Cacchio

Page 10



He was tough and cruel, and I hated him. But now he was dying.

If Everyone Kept God's Commandments

By Hector M. Earle

Page 13



Think of the world that would exist if everyone suddenly realized and acted upon the promise of our Savior.

Virtuous Lady of Acts

By Joan Osborn

Page 15



Some people's performances are so special that they warrant immortal mention in the Bible.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Christian Leadership Should be Y2K Compatible

By Victor Kubik

Page 18

Letters to the Editor

Page 21

Virtual Christian Magazine Staff

Victor Kubik - Managing Editor

Mike Bennett - Staff

Lorelei Nettles - Staff

Joan Osborn - Staff

John Rutis - Staff

Aimee Zahora - Staff

Chris Rowland - Web Design

[Copyright 1999 United Church of God, an International Association](#)

Dispelling Myths of Christ's Birth and Childhood

By Mario Seiglie

How did December 25th come to be celebrated as the date of Christ's birth? Over the years, many legends have sprung up about Christ's birth and childhood. What does the Bible say about these events?



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT Jesus Christ's birth and early childhood? Today, some 2,000 years later, many myths surround the early childhood of Jesus Christ. One fable claims Jesus learned to do miracles from Egyptian magicians when His family fled to Egypt. Another describes the young Jesus making pigeons of clay and impressing other children by making them come to life. Also, millions believe He was born on December 25 and that He never had brothers and sisters.

Jesus Christ embodied truth. Shouldn't His followers, then, also insist on accepting only what is true? Didn't He say: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*"? (John 8:31-32, emphasis added throughout).

The Scriptures provide facts that dispel myths and errors that have crept into the history of His childhood. By reviewing biblical prophecies and the four accounts of Jesus' early years, we can separate truth from error.

A birth predicted 700 years in advance

Prophecies predicted the manner, place and approximate date of Jesus' birth. Some 700 years before the birth of Christ, God challenged King Ahaz to ask for a sign or miracle so God could prove His greatness. When Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, the Lord spoke to him, saying:

"Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold,

the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:11-14).

In the New Testament, this prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated, 'God with us' " (Matthew 1:22-23).

Time and place of birth predicted

Not only was the manner of his birth predicted, but also the place. Four hundred years before Jesus' birth, God inspired the prophet Micah to announce: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

Was it evident that this was a prophecy of the birthplace of the Messiah? When King Herod heard the wise men were searching for the recently born Jesus, he asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Messiah was to be born. The priests and scribes quoted the same verse from the book of Micah and said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet." (Matthew 2:5-6)

Even the *time* of Jesus' birth was roughly known through another prophecy. God had told Daniel by way of an angel: "Know therefore and understand, that *from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until [the coming of the] Messiah the Prince*, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks . . ." (Daniel 9:25). Therefore there would be 69 prophetic "weeks" from the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the appearance of the Messiah.

Even the time of Jesus' birth was roughly known.

Actually, in the original Hebrew, the text does not say 70 "weeks" but 70 "sevens", which can mean 70 groups of seven days, weeks or years. John Walvoord discusses this prophecy in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: "Daniel was first informed that God's program would be consummated in 70 'sevens.' Since Daniel had been thinking of God's program in terms of years (v. 1; cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 2 Chron. 36:21), it would be most natural for him to understand these 'sevens' as years. Whereas people today think in units of tens (e.g. decades), Daniel's people thought in terms of sevens (heptads) . . . Seventy 'sevens' then, is a span of 490 years" (*Logos Software*, 1996).

Although there were several decrees issued by Persian kings concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem, when fitted into this prophecy most would bring us close to the time of the appearance of Jesus Christ, either of His birth or of His ministry. Without going into detail, the main point here is that during Christ's lifetime there was an expectation among the Jews of the coming of the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-3; Luke 3:15; John 1:40-41).

Expectation of the coming Messiah

Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, mentions the Jews had the belief that "about that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth" (*Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter V, Section 4).

The Bible speaks of this expectation of the Messiah in Christ's time: "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, *waiting for the Consolation of Israel* [the fulfillment of the Hebrew prophecies about the Messiah], and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God . . ." (Luke 2:25-27).

There was a firm persuasion... that rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire.

Even the learned Romans had heard of the Jewish prophecies of the coming Messiah, for they applied them to one of their rulers--a contemporary of Jesus, Caesar Augustus! Suetonius, a Roman historian, tells us how the Romans turned the prophecies upside-down: "There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world. This prophecy, which refers to the emperor of Rome, the Jews applied to themselves" (*Life of Vespasian*, 4: 5). Tacitus, another Roman historian, writes of the same belief that "there was a firm persuasion . . . that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire" (*Histories*, 5: 13).

It was no surprise, then, to note the expectation of some and the dismay of others when a group of wise men came to Jerusalem searching for the newly born Messiah. They asked, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, *and all Jerusalem with him*" (Matthew 2:1).

The Jews were filled with hope, but also with apprehension, for they knew of Herod's ruthlessness when he felt any threat to his throne. This is precisely what later occurred with the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).

A prophecy continued

The Jewish people were well aware that the last Old Testament prophet predicted the coming of the Messiah to the temple (Malachi 3-4). They also knew God would first send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple" (Malachi 3:1).

It is fitting then, that the first scene of the New Testament, chronologically speaking, opens with the description of that coming "messenger." This first scene is found in Luke 1 and is actually a *continuation* of Malachi 3-4! It begins with the priest Zacharias in that temple being told by an angel that he would father the very "messenger" (John the Baptist), who would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The four Gospels begin where the Old Testament prophecies leave off, continuing and complementing them and showing their fulfillment in the events around Jesus Christ's coming.

Importance of genealogies

Other prophecies concerned the physical lineage of the Messiah. The official genealogies of

Jewish ancestry were kept in the temple. These genealogies perished when the temple and the archives in Jerusalem were burned by the Romans in 70 A.D. Since it was prophesied that the Messiah would descend from Abraham and David (Genesis 12:1-7; Jeremiah 33:15), it was necessary for anyone who claimed to be the Messiah to be able to verify his ancestry through these official genealogical records.

If he was of Abrahamic descent, this confirmed his religious, hereditary and biological rights. If not, he was considered a Gentile and wasn't regarded as part of the Israelite nation or of its inheritance.

So in Jesus' time, if one claimed to be the Messiah, he would have to prove through his genealogy that he descended from Abraham and David. To prove this was the case for Jesus, His genealogies are placed at the beginning of Matthew (Joseph's genealogy) and in Luke 3 (Mary's genealogy) for all to see and verify.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out: "Matthew's genealogy answered the important question a Jew would rightfully ask about anyone who claimed to be King of the Jews. Is He a descendant of David through the rightful line of succession? Matthew answered yes!" (*Logos Software*, 1996).

Once the official genealogical records were destroyed in 70 A.D., there was no way to confirm if one who claimed to be the Messiah was descended from David. Now no Jew can officially prove that he is descended from Abraham and King David.

The birth date of Jesus

It is remarkable that while the manner, place and genealogy of Jesus are carefully described in the opening chapters of Matthew and John, none of the Gospel writers mentions the date--or even the month--of His birth. There is no recorded celebration of the birth of Christ for the first four centuries. The first recorded "Christ mass" was not observed until several hundred years after the birth of Christ.

Cambridge historian Henry Chadwick explains when and why December 25 was chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus: "Moreover, early in the fourth century there begins in the West . . . the celebration of December 25th, the birthday of the Sun-god at the winter solstice, as the date for the nativity of Christ" (*The Early Church*, 1967, p. 126).

Gerard and Patricia del Re explain: ". . . The tradition of celebrating December 25 as Christ's birthday came to the Romans from Persia. Mithra, the Persian god of light and sacred contracts, was born out of a rock on December 25. Rome was famous for its flirtations with strange gods and cults, and in the third century [274] the unchristian emperor Aurelian established the festival of Dies Invicti Solis, the Day of the Invincible Sun, on December 25.

"Mithra was an embodiment of the sun, so this period of its rebirth was a major day in Mithraism, which had become Rome's latest official religion with the patronage of Aurelian. It is believed that the emperor Constantine adhered to Mithraism up to the time of his conversion to Christianity. He was probably instrumental in seeing that the major feast of his old religion was carried over to his new faith" (*The Christmas Almanac*, 1979, p. 17).

The origins of Christmas cannot be traced back to either the teachings or practices of the earliest Christians. The biblical Holy Days of Jesus and the apostles were neglected by later religious leaders who instituted a new set of holidays in their place.

Jesus not born in December

The Bible records two circumstances relating to Christ's birth that show that December--or any time during the winter season--was a highly unlikely time for Christ's birth. These were the Roman census that took place at the time of His birth and the fact that shepherds were in the fields at night.

The Romans periodically conducted a census for taxation and military recruitment purposes. In the book *Holy-Days and Holidays*, author Cunningham Geikie explains: "This census could hardly have been at that [winter] season, however, for such a time would surely not have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrollment, which necessitated the population traveling from all parts to their natal districts, storms and rain making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter, except in specially favorable years."

Luke, in describing Christ's birth, tells us that shepherds were in their fields at night at the time Christ was born. "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). As the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* tells us, "The shepherds would take turns watching the flock at night to guard against wolves and thieves. The text does not indicate the time of year, although December would be an unusual time of year to be outside at night" (*Logos Ware*, 1996).



Flight to Egypt

Sometime after the birth of Christ, Herod received the disquieting news about the birth from the wise men. Since Herod wanted to destroy Him, he waited impatiently for the men to return so he could find exactly where Jesus lived and have Him killed. But an angel warned the wise men not to return to Herod.

"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.' When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod . . ." (Matthew 2:12-14).

From this account, some popular books speculate the young Jesus might have learned His miracles from the Egyptian magicians. Yet a careful reading of the text shows Jesus was only in Egypt a short time during his infancy--"until the death of Herod." A comparison of Roman and Jewish historical records and the Bible shows that Herod died within months or at most a year or two of the birth of Jesus.

What did Joseph do when he heard of Herod's death? The Bible explains: "Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Arise,

take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead.' Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel . . . and dwelt in a city called Nazareth" (Matthew 2:19-21, 23).

We see that Christ was only in Egypt for only a short time during the first years of His life, and He could not have learned from any Egyptian magicians.

Christ's childhood years

Some point out there is little information in the Gospels about the childhood years of Christ. This is perfectly understandable. The focus of the Gospels is primarily on His ministry beginning at 30. Yet, there is more information in the Bible about His youth than first meets the eye.

For instance, we know during his youth Jesus kept Israel's religious feasts every year with his family. "His parents went to Jerusalem *every year at the Feast of the Passover*. And when He was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast" (Luke 3:41-42).

We also know Jesus lived most of his life up to the age of 30 in the environs of Nazareth. "So He came to Nazareth, *where He had been brought up*. And *as His custom was*, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" (Luke 4:16).



Besides, He was well known in Nazareth for his profession as a builder and carpenter. When He began His ministry, the people from Nazareth asked, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). They would be half-brothers and sisters since Jesus had God as His father and Mary as His mother. The brothers and sisters had Joseph as their father and Mary as their mother.

Some have tried to say these brothers and sisters of Jesus were only "cousins" in order to claim that Jesus was an only child and Mary, through a special method of childbirth, remained a perpetual virgin. Yet the Greek term used here is the normal word for "brother," *adelphos*, whereas the Greek term for cousin, *anepsios*, is not used here (though it is used elsewhere in the New Testament, in Colossians 4:10.) The New Testament writers had a specific Greek word for "cousin" if this were the case, but instead they used the term for a physical brother.

Other references to the physical "brethren of the Lord" are:(Matthew 12:46-47; John 2:12; 7:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:5 and Galatians 1:19).

As for the supposed virginity of Mary after having given birth to Jesus, both Matthew 1:25 and Luke 2:7 call Jesus her "firstborn Son" (*prototokos*). They do not use the term "only child" or "only son" (*monogenes*), although the term for an only son is used elsewhere in the Gospels (Luke 7:12). Clearly, the use of "firstborn Son" to describe Jesus means that other children were later born to Mary.

Facts or fiction?

Another persistent myth tells of Christ doing miracles as a child. This goes back to legends told of Him during the first centuries. Yet this contradicts the biblical account, for we read in John that the *first* miracle done by Jesus was turning the water into wine in the wedding feast in Cana. "This *beginning* of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed Him" (John 2:11).

If Christ would have performed miracles before this time, under the inspiration of God, John could not have written that the miracle at Cana was the *first* sign or miracle performed by Jesus Christ.

There is sufficient information in the Gospels to dispel the myths that have crept into the extra-biblical accounts of Christ's life through the centuries. Most of His life in the Gospels deals with His ministry, because this was the time of His public teaching. His early life is briefly mentioned to confirm how He fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah and to establish the background for His all-important ministry.

One of the responsibilities of a Christian is to believe and faithfully transmit biblical teachings in all their purity and to avoid all falsehoods. It is important to have the record straight about Christ's life. It is the only way we can follow the biblical principle, "*no lie* is of the truth" (1 John 2:21).

I Hated You, Coach Ioveno

By Lenny Cacchio

He was tough and cruel, and I hated him. But now he was dying.



IT SADDENED ME when I saw him. His once vibrant athletic frame was now a shadow of its former self, racked by the crude chemotherapy of the day. I remember most how terribly thin and pale he looked, and how much hair he had lost. But he grinned when he saw me and asked, "Did you play much ball this summer, Leonard?"

"Yep," I said. "Every chance I got."

He was Nick Ioveno, my high school baseball coach. Legend had it that he once played professional baseball and made it all the way to the New York Mets. In his first game someone hit him a ground ball that went right between his legs. So much for his career in The Show.

What I knew about him was crude at best. He was the toughest guy I ever knew. We began baseball practice in the dead of winter doing heavy workouts in the gymnasium, running until our lungs ached, calisthenics until our legs quivered, wind sprints until we collapsed on the gym floor and maybe even tossed our cookies.

But Coach Ioveno and Coach Burgess (the varsity coach) especially liked the indoor practices because they could smash ground balls at us across the gym floor with a fungo bat. Coach Ioveno was expert at having the ball take a short hop and hit us in the knees--or maybe a little higher. If he hit someone a little higher (ringing the bell, he called it), he whooped in a victory shout while the poor guy tried to regain both his breath and his composure.

I hated this guy.

But there was something about this great game of baseball that kept drawing me back, and there was no way I was going to let that man beat me. Coach told us that our team was going to win games because no other team in the league was out there as early as we were, working as hard as we were, and going through the fire as we were. I think he was telling us that we had more to lose than they did. We worked harder, hurt more, sweat more and bled more, so

it should stand to reason that we should want to win more.

When the season started, the discipline, conditioning and the drilling of the fundamentals all worked for our benefit. For some reason we just kept winning. Maybe it had as much to do with the fear of losing. We nearly lost one game early on, and Coach laid it on us with all the power of his lungs during the long bus ride home. "Man," I thought, "we won the game. What will happen if we lose?" Later in the season we did just that and the outburst was intolerably worse.

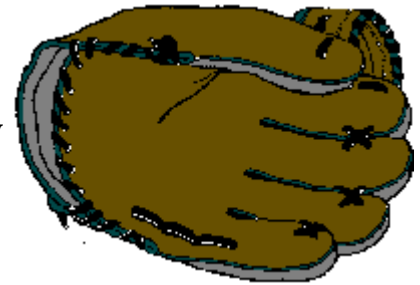
I hated this guy!

We did eventually win the league championship, but came within an inning of letting it slip. We were down 6 to 1 going into the last inning of the last game. We had worked too hard to let it get away, and we rallied to win 7 to 6. Coach was the happiest fellow around. "You're a real winner, boy, if you can come from behind like that!"

When we got back to the locker room, we grabbed him, clothes and all, and threw him into the shower and laughed and joked along with him. This was our last chance to soak him, as most of us would be going on to the varsity team the next year.

Still, I hated this guy.

It was that summer that we learned of his particularly virulent form of Hodgkin's disease. So when I saw him at the start of school in the fall, I was as uncomfortable as a clumsy youth could be when staring the look of death in the face. "Did you play much ball this summer, Leonard?" "Yep. Every chance I got."



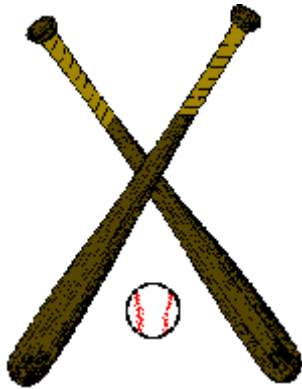
As the year drew on, Coach became smaller and smaller, weaker and weaker. Some days he couldn't even stand in front of his class to teach. I remember walking by his classroom one day and peeking in. He was sitting at his desk, his head hanging limp and forward, his gray, gaunt face drawn and suffering. The class was deathly silent.

When the dead of winter came and baseball practice started, Coach Ioveno was there as usual, barking, joking, teasing and hitting grounders at guy's knees and other parts of their anatomy. Some days were better than others, but he was there most of the time. As the season drew on, he relied more and more on his cane for support, and in a sense it was as painful for us as it was for him. Near the end of the season he was unable to be with his team in the dugout. In order to coach, he stayed in his car in the parking lot and sent his instructions by messenger.

Before our final game of the year, Coach Burgess convened a team meeting in the locker room. "Coach Ioveno has gone into the hospital again, and this time we don't think he's coming out." Coach Burgess then walked out the door and toward the ball field. Someone yelled, "Let's win this one for Coach Ioveno!" We ran onto the field and proceeded to trounce the opposition and win the league championship.

A couple of weeks later I was sitting at a desk in the gym with hundreds of other students

taking my final exams. I looked up and saw a thin, frail, bearded man walking by. It was Coach Ioveno, the man who never quit. He had defied the doctor's prognosis and come back to LaSalle Senior High School where he had dedicated his life.



"How does he do it?" I wondered. It was then I realized that I loved this guy.

That was the last time I saw Coach Ioveno. In the summer of 1970, 29-year-old Nick Ioveno died.

A while back, someone asked me how I envisioned the wonderful resurrection Jesus talked about (Matthew 11:21-24 and 12:41-42). In that day when all will have a chance to know God, whom will I seek out and what will I say? As for me, I will seek out Nick Ioveno. Maybe I'll find a fungo bat and have him hit me some grounders. And I'll also want to thank him for teaching me lessons that have stayed with me even until now.

Lessons such as perseverance in the face of adversity. Never give up. Push yourself beyond what you think your limits are. Strive for excellence. Stay focused on the ball and stay focused on your goals. Think about what you're doing while you're doing it. Master the fundamentals and leave the flashy stuff to Hollywood. The team is more important than your personal batting average. Don't read what the newspaper says about you. Expect every play to come your way, and anticipate what you'll do with the ball. Enthusiasm. Hustle. Win or lose, shake hands with the other team. Most of all, fight until your last breath for what you believe in and what you love.

Thank you, Coach Ioveno, for teaching me these lessons of life.

If Everyone Kept God's Commandments

By Hector M. Earle

Think of the world that would exist if everyone suddenly realized and acted upon the promise of our Savior.



IF EVERYONE KEPT God's commandments, what a beautiful, peaceful, secure, and prosperous world this would be. It would be an enhanced world with meaning and purpose to all our lives.

1. If everyone loved, worshipped, and obeyed the creator God of heaven with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, then worries would be dismissed. He promised to supply all our needs and desires if we put Him first. He said he would bless us, keep us, and give to us bountifully. No doubts, fears, stresses or uncertainties about our future would exist. We would have health, security, peace of mind, a long and successful physical life, as well as an everlasting spiritual life. What more could we ask for? Read on.
2. If everyone disposed of all hindrances and preoccupations that come between man and God (Matt. 19:20-24), then we would see much more of our creator and His presence would be more tangible to us. Our faith in Him would draw us closer together, allowing Him to help us in our times of need.
3. If all humans honored and revered the name of our Creator, we would be careful to think of Him, respect Him, and share with others His almighty power and might. What a keen sense of awareness we would have about the nature, love, and majesty of God.
4. If everyone would set aside that special one day out of seven to cease from all work and consecrate it unto God, we would draw closer to our Father. Our minds and bodies would benefit from the rest and worship every seven days. The health benefits alone would be staggering, not to mention mental and spiritual rejuvenation with which to

begin each week.

5. If all children, young and old, would honor and respect their parents, courtesy, thoughtfulness, and kind deeds would abound. The problems of this world that come through youthful rebellion (drugs, alcohol, gangs, and premarital sex) would vanish. Children would have respect for authority. Think about the long and prosperous life they would live--a kind of life that would make every parent and grandparent's life happy and fulfilling.
6. If all humans saw mankind as being created in the very image and likeness of God, viewing human life as sacred and God-given, then murder would cease. Imagine the peace and security that would erupt all over the world's families, towns, and cities. On a larger scale, think about the peace and security among nations if every one viewed human life as purposeful, believing that only God has the right to decide when it should be taken. Gone would be hate and anger--the very sources of murder and war. In its place would be love, giving, and outgoing concern for others. How desperately our world needs this.
7. Suppose all married couples honored their marriage vows and stayed true to each other for life. Suppose partners were fully aware of their roles both as a spouse and as a parent. Think about how much every society would gain. Think of all the happy well-adjusted children who would be free from the agony and trauma of divorce.
8. If every one would practice the way of give and not selfishly take things that do not rightfully belong to them, then the plague of theft, which robs society to the core, would be eliminated. Think of the trillions of dollars that would be saved and the mutual trust and good will among men that would be present, if theft would suddenly disappear.
9. Imagine if every one put off all manner of deception and lived a life of complete honesty, speaking and practicing the truth in all their dealings with one another. How much trust, respect, and understanding would spread across the world? If everyone would come to fully realize that it is the truth that ultimately prevails (Psalm 117:2), then the world would be a step closer to paradise.
10. If all God's children would rid themselves of the attitude of selfishness and cease from continuously seeking the materialistic spirit, how happy and content we would all be. The burden of jealousy and greed would be lifted. In its place would be happiness, contentment, and the knowledge that the real meaning to life is not about who possesses the most toys, but about a commitment to seeking God's will and His Kingdom above all. We would all come to the realization that covetousness is at the heart of many sins and can produce all manner of evil desires.

This awareness would enable us to come full circle with the realization that there can be no other gods before the Almighty Creator who gives us life and breath. Think of the world that would exist if everyone suddenly realized and acted upon the promise of our Savior, knowing that we have the continuous help of the Holy Spirit to walk in the righteousness of His law. For when we transgress, the atoning blood of Jesus Christ can and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is no wonder then that God's word tells us we are blessed if we keep His commandments (Revelation 22:14).

Virtuous Lady of Acts

By Joan Osborn

Some people's performances are so special that they warrant immortal mention in the Bible.



Katherine Rowland

IN THE CITY OF JOPPA, one of the disciples of the Lord lay dying. Despite the diligent care of the other disciples and perhaps the physicians, the disciple died. The body was prepared for burial and laid in an upper room of the house. From the few brief words we have of this account in Acts 9, it all appears to have happened rather quickly.

The brethren in Joppa were greatly saddened by the death. Having heard that the apostle Peter was in Lydda, a city close to Joppa, they sent for him to come to them. Perhaps they hoped that he would attend to any funeral service that would be performed. Perhaps they had heard of the healing he had performed at Lydda and hoped for another such miracle. Whatever their intentions, we are told that Peter did come to Joppa, and he was the instrument God used to raise the disciple Dorcas from the dead.

This event was momentous. It happened early in New Testament church history sometime shortly after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. It had great impact on the people in the city of Joppa. Acts 9:42 tells us that it became known throughout Joppa and many believed in the Lord.

This event was important to the early church. People could actually see Dorcas after her resurrection and speak with her. She was a walking advertisement of God's truth and power. The account has been left in the Bible as a memorial to her. But I believe it is the works of her life rather than this resurrection that set the greater example for us.

Acts 9:36 tells us, "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." These deeds were so well known that God inspired Luke to include them in the book of Acts.

*Dorcas was a doer
of the word and not
a hearer only.*

When Peter arrived at Dorcas' house, the widows of the church there surrounded him and

began to show him all the garments Dorcas had made for them. This tells us something about Dorcas as a Christian. Dorcas was a doer of the word and not a hearer only.

She gave of herself to help others in several ways. Let's consider the aspect of time. Making clothes in the first century must have been very time consuming. There were not any sewing machines. Everything was cut and sewn by hand. We are not given any details of how Dorcas made the many garments and tunics that she did. Is it possible she wove the material herself? Did she spin the various threads or yarns also? In any case, Dorcas gave of her time to those she made clothing for. Romans 12:1 admonishes us to become living sacrifices. What is our life but time?

What about her talent? Not everyone can sew. I work at sewing, but I don't do it very well. I don't possess enough patience to become a craftsman. The widows who were showing Peter the things Dorcas had made seemed very proud of them. They were probably beautifully made. She must have been very talented, and she used that talent to serve others.

We all have different talents. Talent is more than singing, dancing or sewing. These are good talents to have and use. Did you realize it was a talent to be able to sit and just listen to someone who needs to talk? That's a talent anyone can cultivate.

Dorcas also shows us an example of tender care. It was the widows of the church that came to Peter and showed him the things Dorcas had made. Widows needed special consideration and Dorcas knew this. Remember Acts 9:36 said that Dorcas did charitable deeds. We are not told that Dorcas sewed for her living. It's possible that these garments were made and just given to whomever was in need.

Proverbs 31:20 says that the virtuous woman "extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hand to the needy." There are many times when a simple phone call, card or visit are just the reaching out or the tender care an individual may need.

...people still need our time, our talent and our tender care in our 20th century society. The disciples who sent for Peter implored him to come, and the widows were weeping when Peter arrived. The people of Joppa obviously loved Dorcas very much. She loved them and served them in many ways. One author that I read put it this way. "The works of Dorcas were recognized in the feeling which the Christian community experienced when Dorcas was gone. They remembered her self-consuming service, her compassion, her faithfulness, her charity. They knew that they had lost their dearest friend. The picture of these people gathered about her in her room weeping does not describe people who are sorry for the things and service they have lost but because they had lost one whom they love." (Harold J. Ockenga, *Women Who Made Bible History*, 1962, pp. 224-225)

Dorcas gave time, talent and tender caring to others. And because of this she is immortalized as someone "full of good works." The apostle James would later write, "what does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead."

The world is a busy place. Lives have become complicated. It often seems to take all our

energy just to get ourselves through the day. But we need to remember this example of Dorcas. There are many things we can do for others.

They need not be as complicated as making clothing. They can be as simple as giving a phone call to an elderly shut-in or a few items of food to a local food pantry. We live in different times and different physical circumstances. But people still need our time, our talent and our tender care in our 20th century society. Let's learn from the example of Dorcas.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Christian Leadership Should be Y2K Compatible

By Victor Kubik

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1998, former President of South Africa and Nobel Prize winner, F. W. de Klerk, addressed the Indianapolis Economic Club. He spoke to his audience about what future leaders will have to cope with in the next millennium.

Mr. de Klerk's voice was powerful and booming; he was a man speaking with authority and passion about what he believed, yet he was most statesmanlike in showing deference and respect to his audience.

In 1989, five months after his election to President, F.W. de Klerk made an historic decision to release Nelson Mandela from prison on Robin Island off Capetown. This action ended 60 years of apartheid and control of the country by the minority white population. The world was poised for the worst—a civil war. Instead, a seemingly miraculous transition of power occurred that has made a nation with only a 14% white population live reasonably well with a complex mixture of black peoples. His vision and planning have helped shape the destiny of his nation.

F. W. de Klerk began his speech by talking about the unprecedented growth and change during the past century that eclipsed the progress of the previous 1900 years.

His message centered on four realities of which we must be aware as we enter the 21st century:

1. Increased Globalization
2. Continued Religious and Ethnic Conflict
3. Inevitability of Fundamental Change
4. Poverty and Underdevelopment

Globalization

Whether we like it or not, we are all affected by global politics and economics. South Africa has increasingly become embroiled in problems that are not their own. De Klerk cited the conflict between the United States and Islamic Fundamentalism in the African embassy bombings and consequent retaliations in Kenya and Tanzania. When a Capetown restaurant was bombed, South Africa immediately became a target of retaliation.

Countries around the world are affected by what goes on in other places of the world, though regions may appear absolutely unrelated. For example, Africa, which has a most stable



banking system, was affected by negative uncertainties related to President Clinton's personal scandal.

The reality, de Klerk continued, is not to ignore problems in remote parts of the world. He stated that we cannot write off poorer countries as economic basket cases, mentioning the volatility in the Asian markets and financial instability in Russia as examples. We need to be aware that while this world has fewer borders than ever before, it also has more dangers, and we need skilled leaders who can address these hurdles.

Continued Religious and Ethnic Conflict

Ultimately the source of most conflict is religious, ethnic, and cultural. We have to work with the ideal that there is room and space for all of us on this earth, and we need to be tolerant of one another.

An important lesson of negotiation is management of change. This takes big-minded leadership. We have to reach fundamental agreements even when there are strong conflicting agendas. Negotiation cannot be done with the aim of becoming the victor and crushing an opponent. That won't bring lasting peace. Having countries who are the "Big Boys" decide the future of the world won't work either. The process must include smaller nations as role players. What is best for others cannot be decided by one individual. Those who have the needs must determine what is needed.

Personality also plays an important role in understanding needs. F.W. de Klerk spoke about how he and Nelson Mandela had extremely strong disagreements and deadlocks but worked through them.

Negotiation involves risk and sometimes leaps of faith. These leaps of faith involve compromise and a commitment to discovering win-win solutions. Involved parties may have to make painful departures from their original negotiating positions. Success comes when the reasonable interests of all parties are addressed

Inevitability of Fundamental Change

Nothing endures but change. The revolution that we're going through in the world today can be likened to the vast transformation brought about by the Industrial Revolution. We need leaders to manage and lead that change. These leaders must overcome natural resistance to change as well as a tendency to cling to what they are accustomed. Leaders should be quick to ask what's wrong and be ready to lead a process of change. Old dreams may fail to bring justice.

De Klerk pointed out that leaders must:

- Face the facts
- Present a new vision to constituents, by stating the vision in such a way that it expresses the NEED to change and a WAY in which change can be achieved.
- Provide inspiration, strategy and an action plan

De Klerk spoke of his vision to bring unity--one citizenship--one man/one vote to Africa and

to eliminate apartheid. There was the choice to bring about this vision gradually or as a quantum leap. The quantum leap approach was chosen, and it turned things around 180 degrees. It was feared that if the gradual route had been taken, the world would perceive this as changing only under pressure. At first de Klerk felt that those outside of Africa would feel as though bluffing had occurred, but credibility was built when words were turned into deeds.

The plan involved the following:

- Release of Nelson Mandela
- Decision of how the change was going to take place
- Leveling of the playing field
- Involvement of a widespread group of leaders who were involved in the process
- Forging a vision and action plan

De Klerk said that the changes in South Africa were not a miracle. They came as a result of careful planning, hard work, and vision. This change brought justice to all and became the basis for constitutional and economic development as agreement came to a policy framework.

For his work, de Klerk was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Nelson Mandela in 1993; later the same year, the two shared the honor as Time magazine's "Man of the Year" alongside Yassar Arafat and Yitzak Rabin.

Poverty and Underdevelopment

A developing country must provide for poorer countries. Markets must be opened to developing countries, and a way must be found to protect the poorer countries so that they won't be preyed upon. These are the big challenges to the global community of the 21st century.

Closing Thoughts

I will never forget what I saw and heard that day at the Indianapolis Economic Club. After his speech, I spoke briefly with F.W. de Klerk, expressing my deep appreciation for his remarks about all that he had done and his boldness in articulating his thoughts.

As we move into the Year 2000, it is important to remember the prophesied transition from this world's kingdoms to the Kingdom of our God. It will be a world that resounds the ideals of F.W. de Klerk's vision. This vision, however, will not be of man's doing but in spite of his doings.

Letters to the Editor

Articles about Home and Public Schooling



I really appreciated the [article regarding public school](#) written by Becky Bennett. We need to hear more about ways to make the public school system a positive experience!! The Home School proponents get a lot of air time but I feel they are depriving their kids of these valuable lessons so well articulated in the article. As a future mom, I think about the issues a lot and loved hearing someone say something good about public schools. I believe education is what the family makes it.

I also appreciated the research that went into the article and the additional resources at the end. Thanks for taking the time to write this excellent article.

-- Colene Erickson



I used to teach in the public school system. The reason I left was that teaching isn't what it used to be; unfortunately, it's become mostly "classroom management" due to a lack of instruction at home in basic acceptable conduct. I'm convinced that home schooling is the only way to combat the growing "intolerance" of basic Christian values in today's public schools.

I appreciated this article very much. I was wondering if there would ever be a interest in sharing Sabbath School lesson ideas. Basically, I create mine from scratch every time due to the variety of ages and capabilities within our small local group of kids.

-- Karen Herschleb



Thank you so much for [addressing the issue of home schooling](#) in your magazine. I have four children (6,4,2 and 3 months) that I have been home schooling since birth (we all do you know - if not formally but through our example). I would love to create a website were members of the churches of God can get together and discuss what has worked for them in different areas. Do you know if anyone would be interested in such a thing?? Of course there would be no cost to anyone to look at the site, I can easily put a website together and I already have the space to do so.

There is another great website that I have found very useful for K2 through K5 skills you can check it out at <http://home1.gte.net/jslewis/>

Mrs. Lewis has put together a good idea of the specific skills your child needs to learn from 2 up to 5.

Thanks again for the good article.

-- Laura Anderson



Great [article on the public schools](#). I would add my opinion though that a voucher system would not be "abandoning the public schools" but would make them more competitive for students. Competition improves everything and everyone and if the schools are doing a good job and the parents are happy that their children are safe, happy and really learning in a non hostile environment where parents do not feel they are being undermined, then the schools need not fear a voucher system. However to say that a voucher system is akin to abandoning the public school system is to tacitly admit that there are, in fact big, widespread and serious problems in the public school system is it not?

-- David Jenkins, Port. St. Lucie, FL



Well researched and well written, with helpful information for those who choose to home school.

-- Sue Robbins

Thoughts for Thanksgiving



Congratulations, Mike, on a fine piece on materialism. Hope a lot of people find their way to this VCM.

Keep up the good work,

-- Larry Greider



Thank you very much for the article in VCM. It was very thought provoking. It touched my heart, and I'm richer for it.

-- Nancy Corbett



Very good article.

As Americans we often forget to be thankful! There is so much available to us in this land. Even in the worst conditions in America we are better off than most in the world.

The difficulty is reminding ourselves of this and reinforcing it to our children.

-- Marcus Brown

Making copies of VCM articles



We have been currently making copies of the VCM for local members who do not have Internet access. Many have commented on the quality of the magazine and some didn't even realize it was a Church publication.

My question is - to make things easier to print out, would it be possible to make a PDF version of the newsletter available?

Thanks much and happy Sabbath.

-- Jeff Clarke, Bethlehem, PA

ED: We are working on this and hope to implement this feature soon.

Permission to Make Copies of VCM articles



Would it be possible to get your permission for something? I shared the recent article from the VCM about the [end of the world](#) by Mr. Schroeder with a number of people at work via e-mail.

I received the following message:

Joe,

This is a good, sound article. I'd like to take it to our Executive Board meeting on Thursday, and see if we could use it in the December newsletter? The November newsletter is already being printed up, but, my thought is that there may be some Christians here at the COP that are struggling with the rumors of the Millennium. This would be very comforting, don't you think? Please let me know.

Thanks.

Can they use the article in its entirety if they give the credits and where it is coming from in a Christian newsletter at work? The City of Phoenix allows distribution of this monthly or bimonthly newsletter as long as no City of Phoenix funds support it. Perhaps, this might be a good avenue to increase exposure to Church literature? What are your ideas on this matter? Good, bad, indifferent?

I had also mentioned to the lady, Susan, that there will be some upcoming articles on the Millennium which may be of interest. And she sounds interested.

-- Joe Camerata

ED: Please feel free to use the article if proper credit and the URL for Virtual Christian Magazine is clearly displayed.