



Christmas Greetings

Christmas is special, because of Christ. The world may not appreciate Him, but to us He is precious. Have a wonderful Christmas!

Originally, we planned a Christmas-theme for the Bible study. Though not focused on His birth, the articles note that Christians (like our Heavenly Savior) are from above.

2012 Travel

The interim pastorate kept us close to home. In April, I spoke at Believers Bible Church, Corsicana, TX, pastored by Steve Elkins. In May, the family gathered for our younger son's (Joseph's) graduation from Cal State Fullerton. We took Diane's father, Earl, home to Silver Lake, OR, via US 395. This let us visit a place I always wanted Diane to see: Mono Lake. It is unique, with its tufa spires and tiny brine shrimp (but no fish). Water flows in, but not out. Water, water everywhere, but not a drop of living water. Likewise, believers stagnate if they do not share the word. Quite an object lesson.

My Memorial Day message at Fort Rock Community Church (pastored by Jeremy Warkentin) was Psalm 11: "If the Foundations Are Destroyed." If you have not heard our exposition of that passage, you may do so at:

<http://www.mol316.com/pages/psalms.html>.

On June 19 I met in Longmont, CO, with ministry staff from several Denver Rescue Mission locations. Together we explored Ephesians, considering the implications of Christ joining Jews and Gentiles together in one new body, the church.

In September, Diane and I went to Minneola (KS) Community Church, pastored by Shawn Leach. I spoke on Nicodemus at church and Ephesians 2 in Sunday school. We also returned to Yampa Valley Baptist



Yampa Valley Baptist Church
Craig, CO



Andy Zivojinovic and John
Chicago, IL

Church, Craig, CO, for a five-day Bible conference. In 2011, Steve Lewis and I spoke these on John's Gospel, so grace issues in James and Ephesians were this year's topic. Diane particularly enjoyed catching five trout at Lake Avery. Pastor Dale is a part-time hunting and fishing guide, so he knows where to fish and many tricks of the trade. Diane regards having a trout on the line as almost millennial.

On November 11 I spoke at Community Bible Church of Washington, IL, pastored by Chuck Replogle. At the motel, I met a man ministering in inner-city Chicago. When asked if he would like some Gospels of John, he said, "We can always use John's Gospel." I gave him a hundred.

The next day, we stopped to meet Pastor Andy Zivojinovic at New Hope Bible Church in Chicago's inner-city. Previously we supplied him *Living Waters* by relay, but now dropped off 1,200 in-person.

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Does Jesus Really Want Believers to be Born *Again*?

by Dr. John Niemelä

When Nicodemus visited Jesus the first time by night, he already knew from Jesus' Passover signs that He was a God-sent teacher (John 3:2). However, he puzzled over the Teacher's words.

Jesus first sought to clarify spiritual birth (3:3 and 7), an Old Testament idea. Though the translation *born again* (from *gennēthē anōthen*) is not impossible lexically, Jesus really said something entirely different: *born from above*. Of ten uses outside John 3, *anōthen* cannot mean *again* in any (except Galatians 4:9).

Matthew 27:51 // Mark 15:38 the veil ... was torn in two from top to bottom
Luke 1:3 having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first
John 19:11 You would have no authority ... if it hadn't been given you from above
John 19:23 woven in one piece from the top
Acts 26:5 They knew me from the first
Galatians 4:9 you turn again [*palin*] to the weak ... elements ... you desire again [*anōthen*] ... bondage
James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above
James 3:15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic
James 3:17 the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable ...

John 3 contrasts *from-below* concepts with *from-above* ones. Note what Jesus told Nicodemus:

If I have told you earthly things ..., how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? Now no one has ascended [from earth] into Heaven except the One who descended [to earth] from heaven... (1:12-13)

Steve Walkup (Denver Rescue Mission) notes that water and wind are from the heavens above. John 3:5 (born of water and the Spirit/spirit/wind) restates being born *from above*. Note 3:5-8's play on the range of meaning for *pneuma* (spirit, wind): *Spirit* (2×), *spirit* (1×), and *wind* (1×). Eight translations render *anōthen* as *from above*: *Young's Literal*¹⁸⁹⁸, *New Jerusalem*¹⁹⁸⁵, *New American*¹⁹⁸⁶, *NRSV*¹⁹⁸⁹, *God's Word*¹⁹⁹⁵, *NET*²⁰⁰⁴, *Rotherham*¹⁹⁹⁹, and *Idiomatic Translation*²⁰⁰⁶. Consider *anōthen* in John 3 from that standpoint:

3:3 unless one is born from above [*anōthen*], he cannot see the kingdom of God (Niemelä translation)
3:7 You^{plural} must be born from above [*anōthen*] (Niemelä translation)
3:31 The One who comes from above [*anōthen*] is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly [from below] and talks in an earthly way. The One who comes from Heaven is above all.

Jesus was shocked that a teacher of Israel could be ignorant of spiritual birth (from Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 37:1-10; and I Samuel 10:6-9). It was Nicodemus' preposterous notion of re-entering the womb that suggested *born again* to translators here, but Jesus rejects such a *from-below* mindset (3:10-13). Jesus defines *anōthen*, not Nicodemus. John 1:12-13 aims, instead, toward God's children being born *from above*.

But to as many as did accept Him, He gave the right to be God's children, to those who believed in His Name, who were born, not of blood [plural, e.g., bloodlines], nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man [*anēr* = husband], but of God [who is above].

Becoming God's child is a *from-above* birth unto life. By contrast, birth from bloodlines, birth from sexual lust [fleshly will], and birth from a husband's desire each describe birth *from below* (that lacks eternal life).

Nicodemus puzzled over repeating his *from-below* birth by re-entering the womb. He missed the point. Unbelievers are dead, already perishing (3:16), and need life *from above* (3:3, 7). Only birth *from above* gives life—life eternal—as God's child. Rather than alive (i. e., physically born) people again being born, Jesus calls them *dead* and *unborn* (having not yet passed from death to life). Birth *from above* is the one and only birth Jesus discusses.

The Shekinah Glory Tabernacled Among Us

by George Niemelä

The Shekinah glory (God's presence with Israel) first appears in the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Then in the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, the Shekinah was the locus of God's interaction with Israel. Then, God twice (in I Samuel and Ezekiel) removed the Shekinah from Israel for rebellion. However, His eternal faithfulness pledges for the Shekinah ultimately to return.

Ezekiel opens his book with a spectacular depiction of God's glory, before It withdraws.

¹²⁶ On the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. ²⁷Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. ²⁸Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

After Judah refused to repent nationally from its idolatry (Ezekiel 8–9), God's glory departed from the Temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:23), leaving it *ichabod* ("without glory"; that is, *without the Shekinah*). God never shares His glory with idols. However, Ezekiel 43:1-5 proclaimed this as temporary; the Shekinah will return in the Millennial Temple. Has the Shekinah ever again been present with Israel (since Ezekiel's day)?

Yes! John presents Jesus as the returned Shekinah, manifesting glory from the Father.

¹¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived [*skēnoō*] among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the Father's Only-begotten, full of grace and truth.

John inextricably links Christ to the Shekinah glory by evoking the Tabernacle and divine glory through *skēnoō* (live or dwell). He recalls the Hebrew *shākēn* (dwell in a tent), from which consonantal-root *Shekinah* (the tent-dwelling/Tabernacle-dwelling [glory]) comes. The departed Shekinah returned — in the person of Jesus Christ who manifested "glory, glory as of the Father's Only-begotten, full of grace and truth." Just as God's glory tabernacled (dwelt in a tent) with Israel in the Old Testament, Jesus tabernacled among His disciples and His people. John 12:37-41 identifies Jesus as the same glory Isaiah saw and described. While prophets only glimpsed God's glory, disciples experienced God's glory daily through three-plus years of ministry.

Further, Jesus continues the Shekinah's Old Testament role as God's interface with man (cf. John 1:51). He always held this role: prophets never saw the Father, but communicated what Christ (even in Old Testament times) revealed to them about the Father. Consider John 1:18:

No one has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart — He has made Him known.

Jesus presented Himself differently than in the Old Testament, despite being the Shekinah glory seen by both Isaiah and Ezekiel and despite being God. People expected a Messiah radiating glory, but Jesus disguised Himself in ordinariness. However, John explicitly says three of Christ's signs manifested His (Shekinah) glory (water to wine, raising Lazarus, and His death-and-resurrection).

²¹¹ This first of His miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee, and thus displayed His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.

¹¹⁴ He said, "This sickness will not end in death, but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ... ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

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12²³ The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces a large crop...

His miracles manifest glory by revealing His person and work. Even Pharisees could not deny Jesus' miracles. Rather, they dismissed them as satanic works (certainly God rubber-stamped their legalistic Sabbath rules). Those resisting Jesus' signs only saw a mere man. However, those open to Him beheld God's glory.

By God's grace, His glory did not depart from Israel forever, despite their unfaithfulness. God glorifies His Name by manifesting grace to an undeserving people (Ezekiel 20). In condescending to become a man, Christ guarantees everlasting life to all believers. John's Gospel gives flashes of Christ's glory, identifying Him as God, so unbelievers may believe in Him for everlasting life.

As in the Old Testament, the Glory departed (as Christ left in His Ascension before sending the Spirit). As in I Samuel and Ezekiel, Jesus promised to return. The Glory will return to Israel in the Millennium. Ezekiel 43:1-5 says God's glory will re-inhabit the Temple. No longer will Jerusalem be *ichabod* (without glory), but Ezekiel 48:35 renames it "THE LORD IS THERE."

2012 travel continued...

On the fourteenth, I read a paper at the Evangelical Theological Society in Milwaukee, WI: "Early Publishing Technology: Scrolls vs. Codices" (<http://www.mol316.com/pdfs/Codices.pdf>). It was well-received.

We saw Roger Lamfers on our way to Omaha. On November 18, I spoke at Grace Bible Church



Grace Bible Church
Omaha, NE

in Omaha, NE, pastored by Dan Hauge, and at Jansen (NE) Bible Church, pastored by Paul Carpenter. My only regret was we needed more *Living Water* for Nebraska. Soon, more should be on the way.

In Omaha, we learned that a friend, Joe Lombardi, was on the road to a new pastorate in Nebraska. Two boxes of John awaited his arrival.

Prayer Requests & Upcoming Publications

We ask for your prayers for our ministry: for strength to minister as the Lord opens doors; for ongoing partnership with the Denver Rescue Mission (1) to minister to many and (2) to refine further our understanding of John; for completing current writing projects; for financial provision from the Lord; for God to send the message of life forth in a world hostile to Him.

Zane Hodges' long-awaited commentary (*Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*) will soon go to press. What a privilege to write its "Introduction" and "Technical Notes"! Editing is almost complete. My article, "That I May Attain to Whose Resurrection?" will soon appear in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. For 2013, we are hard at work on several projects.

Lifeline

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