

## **God's Surprise Gift**

- **1 Corinthians 2:7-8** But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- **2 Corinthians 9:15** Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.
- Satan is a created being. He shares none of the attributes of Almighty God -- not omniscience, omnipresence, nor omnipotence, meaning that he is limited in knowledge and space and power.
- When it comes to predicting what God is going to do next, Satan has to rely on what he can figure out, what he remembers from the timeless past when he resided in heaven as a favorite angel, and what he reads in Holy Scripture. Since the Holy Spirit does not enlighten his understanding, Satan sees as the world sees, not with the mind of Christ.
- **Ephesians 4:18** Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:
- Once we understand this, a hundred puzzles fall into place. The Apostle Paul pointed out that had Satan known what God was up to, he would never have crucified Jesus. But God pulled the wool over the devil's eyes and fooled him.
- On that first Easter Sunday morning, an imp rushed into the presence of his satanic majesty, interrupting Hell's celebration over the death of Jesus. The demon breathlessly announced that the tomb was empty, the body gone, and the soldiers looked like they had seen a ghost. Satan spewed out his champagne and cursed. He had been had and he knew it. He had played right into God's hands and was defeated.
- Sometimes in biblical history, we see that the Lord manipulated Satan, as in the cases of Job and Joseph. Sometimes, God gave faced Satan head on, like at Mount Carmel when Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in a fire-calling contest. At other times, the Lord used an ambush to fool his enemy. Christmas is one of those times.
- **Micah 5:2** But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.
- Satan can read. He knew from Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. What he did not know was the timing of the Savior's birth. So, in another of his endless efforts to thwart the purposes of God, Satan pulled in demons from around the world to concentrate on the Holy Land, specifically the region around Bethlehem. That's one reason for the innumerable cases of demon possession in the New Testament. The demons practically outnumbered the citizens. They served as Satan's spies and were charged with keeping an eye out for godly young couples about to have babies. Satan was lying in wait for the Messiah.
- The first thing God did was to choose a man and woman not from Bethlehem, but from Nazareth, far to the north. Secondly, he saw to it that the woman's purity and morality would be doubted. The devil can count; he knows it takes nine months to have a baby. He had no way of knowing of Gabriel's visits to Mary and Joseph or of the miraculous conception of this Baby. If he heard at all of this young Nazarene couple, he quickly discounted them, certain that the holy God he remembered from heaven would never use such obvious sinners for such a sacred role.
- The third thing God did was to arrange to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in time for the birth, but not so as to draw attention to themselves. When Caesar Augustus put out a call for a census of the empire, it was God that had put it in his heart.
- **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.
- Mary and Joseph were among thousands returning to their ancestral homes for the census. Perhaps the roads experienced a primitive form of gridlock. With Bethlehem's inns and available homes filled, the young couple took the only thing offered, a stable.
- **Luke 2:7** And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
- Even if the devil's imps were extremely vigilant, they would have dismissed the young family camping out in a barn for good reason. The God that Satan remembered from heaven resided in a level of glory unimagined on earth. Satan was unsure of a lot of things, but one thing he knew - God would not allow his Son to be born in a barn! Doubtless he had told his demons to check the finest homes for the most illustrious surroundings and outstanding parents. But the Lord fooled him.

- **1 Corinthians 1:27** But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
- This is a basic lesson of spiritual warfare which historically Satan seems incapable of grasping. To this day, no carnal mind believes it!
- When Jesus was born, God prepared a welcoming committee of the lowliest people on the planet - shepherds - primarily to reassure the young parents that all was well. Satan had no way of seeing the angels that appeared to these sheep herders that night or hearing their clues on how to identify the Baby.
- **Luke 2:12** And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
- No one noticed or cared when a small company of ragtag shepherds ran breathlessly through the village looking for (what else?) a stable. Later, after Joseph had moved his little family into a house in Bethlehem, a delegation of foreign visitors arrived. These magi from the east had created no small stir in Jerusalem as they naively announced their search for the one "born king of the Jews."
- **Matthew 2:2** Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.
- From the gifts they presented, Joseph was able to finance a sudden trip to Egypt made necessary when murderous King Herod sent soldiers on a search-and-destroy mission for the babies of Bethlehem. Satan would have fumed to learn that the objects of his wrath were already out of town, slowly making their way toward Egypt where they would remain until Herod's death. Eventually, when the holy family re-entered the country, they moved to Nazareth where Joseph opened his carpentry shop. Satan had lost Jesus!
- Jesus grew up with a normal Jewish childhood in Nazareth. He was not a "Superboy in Smallville," amazing the hometown folks with his miracles and inspired teaching. Had he done that, Satan would have heard the talk about the boy wonder and come calling. The first the devil learned of Jesus' real identity was the day the Lord stepped into the waters of the Jordan and waded to John the Baptist. Nudged by the Holy Spirit, John called out the words that let everyone know that Jesus from Nazareth was the Messiah.
- **John 1:29** Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.
- Jesus' baptism was the inauguration of His ministry. The gloves were off. Jesus was saying, "Here I am, devil! Do your worst. I'm ready." The game was afoot; the battle was joined. It came to a head one day about three years later on a hill outside Jerusalem. For a couple of days, Satan reveled in his victory. Then, on that first Easter Sunday morning, an imp came running in, all out of breath ... the resurrection was God's surprise gift to the entire world!
- Did you know that the devil can't predict what YOU are going to do next either? God can read your thoughts, but the devil can't! All he has to rely on is what he can figure out from what you've done in the past ... the temptations you've yielded to, the mistakes you've made, the feelings you've expressed, the limits you've imposed on yourself, the decisions you've made. And he assumes that you're never going to change ... but he forgets about God's great gift of repentance!
- Why not give God, yourself, your family, and your church a surprise gift this Christmas? Make that decision to repent, to be baptized, to get involved in ministry, to make 2005 the best year ever? That's the only Christmas gift that God wants!