

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

Acquiring God's Peace On Earth: Lessons From The Infant Jesus' Presentation At The Temple Part I: Acquiring Peace By Relying On Christ's Atonement Alone Like Mary (Luke 2:21-24)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Luke 2:14 KJV reports that when the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the Bethlehem shepherds, they proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will toward men."

However, Clifford May, president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, in his November 28, 2015 Republican-American op-ed, p. 6A, noted that though "'(p)ease on earth' is a lovely Christmas wish . . . history demonstrates it's not mankind's natural state . . . We live not in a global village but a global jungle -- and the law of the jungle operates." He supported this claim by naming recent acts of terrorism and oppression in the world, *Ibid.*

In reality, the better manuscript reading at Luke 2:14 presents the angels asserting "peace to men on whom His [God's] favor rests," Luke 2:14 NIV. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 208; Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Greek N. T., 1971, p. 133) One must be a personal recipient of God's favor to know His peace in a troubled world.

Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church wants mankind to know peace. Francis X. Rocca's story, "Pope Appeals to Foes in Africa War Zone" (The Wall Street Journal, November 30, 2015, p. A12) told how the pope recently urged "fighters waging a civil war" in the "Central African Republic . . . to lay down their weapons and seek reconciliation." Pope Francis would appeal to the teachings of his Roman Catholic Church to direct those who hate in war to gain a new heart and thus come to know peace on earth by partaking of God's salvation that is offered in Jesus.

However, various officials in the Catholic Church have claimed that salvation occurs not only through Jesus, but through Mary the Mother of Jesus: James Cardinal Gibbon, Archbishop of Baltimore, approved of the book The Glories of Mary by Bishop Alphonse de Liguori, a saint in the Roman Catholic Church (Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 138), and on pages 82 and 83 of the book, Bishop de Liguori wrote: "'And she is truly a mediatrix of peace between sinners and God. Sinners receive pardon by . . . Mary alone.'" (*Ibid.*, Boettner) On page 94 he added, "'He fails and is lost who has not recourse to Mary,'" *Ibid.*, Boettner. On page 160, the Bishop claimed: "'Mary is called . . . the gate of heaven because no one can enter that blessed kingdom without passing through her,'" and on pages 169 and 170, he wrote: "'The Way of Salvation is open to none otherwise than through Mary . . . Our salvation is in the hands of Mary . . . He who is protected by Mary will be saved, he who is not will be lost,'" *Ibid.*, Boettner, p. 139. On page 180 of his book, Bishop de Liguori wrote, "'All power is given to thee in Heaven and on earth . . . at the command of Mary all obey -- even God . . .'" (*Ibid.*, Boettner)

The Raccolta, a prayer book that has been "especially indulged" by several popes, making it accepted as authoritative by many Roman Catholics, includes the following prayer to Mary: "'Leave me not, My Mother, in my own hands, or I am lost; let me but cling to thee. Save me, my Hope; save me from hell.'" (*Ibid.*, Boettner, p. 140)

Need: Accordingly, we ask, "If one wants to be a recipient of God's favor so as to know real peace on the earth this Christmas, must he turn to Mary along with Jesus to gain God's salvation? How do we know?!"

- I. When Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the Jewish temple following His circumcision on the eighth day and the days of Mary's ceremonial purification from childbirth, they came to fulfill two directives of the Mosaic Law: (1) the presentation of Mary's firstborn son to God (Luke 2:21-23 with Exodus 13:2, 12) and (2) the offering of either two turtledoves or two young pigeons, Luke 2:24.**
- II. These offerings in their Old Testament contexts respectively teach (1) the Substitutionary Atonement of Jesus and (2) the sinfulness of His Mother Mary Who herself needed His atonement to be saved:**
 - A. The offering accompanying Mary's presentation of her firstborn son to God (Luke 2:21-23) anticipated Christ's future Substitutionary Atonement for the sins of the whole world at the cross (as follows):
 1. Mary paid five temple shekels (Num. 3:46-48; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Ex. 22:29-30) to redeem her infant son Jesus, a redemption that memorialized God's deliverance of Israel's firstborn of man and beast when the Angel of the Lord slew all Egypt's firstborn at the first Passover, Exodus 13:12-16.
 2. The basis for God's deliverance of Israel's firstborn at that event was the death of the Passover lamb and the application of its blood to the side posts and upper post of the doors of Israel's houses, Exodus 12:1-13.
 3. This Passover lamb thus typified Jesus as the Substitutionary Atonement for man's sin that we might be saved through Him (1 Cor. 5:7b; 2 Cor. 5:21), so Mary's presentation of the infant Jesus to God at the temple, in recalling the Passover deliverance, anticipated His Substitutionary Atonement! (Heb. 10:4-10)

- B. However, in sharp contrast to this offering for Jesus, Mary's offerings of two birds emphasized her own sinfulness and thus her need for Jesus' atonement on the cross that she might be saved from sin and hell:
1. The offering of the inexpensive two birds instead of the more costly two lambs was allowed by God in the case of poverty (Lev. 5:7), so the Luke 2:24 report that Mary brought two birds indicates she was poor.
 2. These offerings fulfilled the Leviticus 12:1-8 directives that a woman who had given birth to a child, though not guilty of sin in doing so, was still to recognize and focus on the fact that she was a **sinner**:
 - a. For 7 days after giving birth to a son, every Hebrew mother was ceremonially unclean, and had to wait another 33 days before she could qualify to enter the temple, Lev. 12:1-4; Bib. Know. Com., O. T., p. 191.
 - b. This practice recalled the Genesis 3:16 Adamic curse for sin as applied to a woman relative to childbirth, which, due to the curse, led to her having ceremonially unclean post-natal discharges, *Ibid.*, p. 191-192.
 - c. Thus, the offerings of the birds were made for the woman because she was a sinner who needed an atonement for her sin with a sin offering followed by a burnt offering of rededication to God: (1) Leviticus 12:8 teaches that the two birds were offered by the woman, one as a sin offering to atone for her own sin and the other as a burnt offering of rededication to the Lord. (2) This practice mirrors the Leviticus 5:7 command that required any Hebrew man or woman who had committed an act of sin to offer both a sin offering and a burnt offering of rededication to God following his or her forgiveness of sin, Lev. 5:1-10. (3) In the event of an actual act of sin, the one bringing such sacrifices had to confess his or her act of sin (Leviticus 5:5-7), so though Mary had not actually committed a sin in giving birth to Jesus, her function of offering the two birds as sacrifices made her aware of her sinfulness as being under the Adamic curse.
 3. God had commanded these sacrifices from every woman in Israel (Leviticus 12:1-8), and since Mary heeded that command according to Luke 2:24, she approached God at the temple as a sinner in need of salvation in accord with her previous words of needing God's salvation in her Magnificat at Luke 1:46-47.

III. Then, by faith through Christ's atonement, Mary was saved and later indwelt by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in coming to enjoy real peace on the earth (as follows):

- A. Mary had great joy at Jesus' birth (Luke 1:46-47; 2:19-20) followed by great grief at His death (Luke 2:34-35).
- B. However, Mary with her sons were among the believers who met together and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and who thus triumphantly spoke of the wonderful works of God, Acts 1:14; 2:1-11.
- C. So, through Christ's atonement and a life of faith, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, came to know peace on earth.

IV. In summary, then, all mortal humans, including Mary, the earthly Mother of Jesus, need the application of Christ's atonement at the cross to be saved, so salvation is ONLY through Christ's death on the cross.

V. Once thus saved, any believer like Mary the earthly Mother of Jesus enjoys God's peace on earth even in a troubled world by relying on the indwelling Holy Spirit of God for life and for service.

Lesson: *To be a recipient of God's favor so as to know real peace on the earth this Christmas, we must rely on Christ and His atonement ALONE by faith to be saved, and then live our lives in reliance on God's Holy Spirit.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Jesus Christ as our sole Mediator with God to be saved from sin and hell, John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:5. (2) May we realize that Mary was a sinner, that she needed to trust in Jesus to be saved like the rest of humanity, and uphold Christ's atonement as the sole way through which we are saved. (3) Then may we like Mary rely on the Holy Spirit to tell of God's wonderful works and to know His peace on earth in this world!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Jesus' own words regarding His mother Mary inform us about her role (*Ibid.*, Boettner, p. 151-156):

- (1) In John 2:1-5, when Mary told Him there was no more wine at the wedding feast, Jesus said He was not heeding her for His ministry, but that He was subject to the Father's will, and Mary submitted to Jesus in the matter.
- (2) In Matthew 12:46-50, when He was told that His mother Mary and His earthly brothers were standing outside the house seeking to speak with Him, Jesus said that His family were those who did the will of His Father in heaven, that any Biblical, godly believer is truly a member of His family at least on par with His believing Mother.
- (3) In Luke 11:27-28 when a woman shouted out a blessing about the woman who had born and nursed Him, Jesus replied that more blessed than Mary in her role as His Mother were those who heard God's Word and obeyed it.
- (4) In John 19:26-27, Jesus delegated the care of His Mother Mary to the Apostle John, indicating not only His sovereignty over her, but revealing her need for male livelihood care that was typical of any other woman in her era.

May we realize that Mary was a sinner saved by grace through Christ's atonement and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a godly life. Then, may we like her trust in Christ and rely on the Holy Spirit for peace.