

# Christ is Victor

NOV/DEC 2004

## “Sun of Righteousness”

*“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” Malachi 4:2*

Christ is compared to the Sun of righteousness. The sun gives us light and heat. The sun kills the disease germs when its light is allowed to reach the earth in its intensity. Christ came with spiritual warmth for spiritual healing. He brought spiritual light. The sun is responsible for all the energy on the earth. The sun’s energy is stored up in oil, coal, and wood. So also whatever spiritual light, illumination, and warmth you find on earth is due to the Sun of righteousness-Christ. Christ was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire. Spiritual illumination in whatever form it has come, has come from the eternal Christ. Just as the sun rises in the east and drives away darkness and cold and bring warmth into the air, so when Jesus Christ came the terrible darkness in the world had to flee.

The impact of Christ’s teaching was felt all over the world. The reformation of Hinduism in India is also due to this impact. The Greeks were idolaters, but within 200 years after Christ the whole framework of their religion crumbled down. They reformed and re-reformed their religion to make it co-exist with Christianity, but ultimately could not succeed. The light of Christianity is

... “SUN” CON’T ON PAGE 4

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## “Sankey’s Song on Christmas Eve”

The stocky, mustached man nervously paced the deck of a Delaware River steamer, unbuttoning his frock coat, and regularly removing his derby to wipe his brow. He looked much older than his thirty-five years.

It was unseasonably warm for a Christmas Eve.

The man stared at the passing Pennsylvania shoreline, thinking of his family in Newcastle, some three hundred miles to the west, whom he might not see this Christmas, unless he made his train connection in Philadelphia. Christmas 1875.

*“Pardon me, sir. Aren’t you Ira Sankey, the gospel singer?”* He smiled at the lady and her husband... He thought he was gracious to acknowledge that he was, indeed, Ira D. Sankey.

*“We’ve seen your pictures in the newspapers.”*

He had not wanted to be recognized: Not today, not tonight. He was tired and fretful and warm. Fact of the matter was, he was angry and provoked with Mr. Moody.

*“We thought you were still in England!”* said the lady. *“We returned last week, Madam,”* Mr. Sankey replied in his resonant baritone voice. And if Mr. Moody hadn’t insisted on more conferences and meetings, he thought, he would have been home by now for Christmas with his family. Instead he was a prisoner on a river steamer.

*“Mr. Sankey, would you sing for us? It is Christmas Eve, and we’d love to hear you.”*

Mr. Sankey said he would sing, and his presence was announced loudly across the deck. As the people gathered, he pondered what he might sing. He wished he had his portable pump organ which had become an integral counterpart to his singing. But no matter. He would sing a Christmas carol or

two, unaccompanied. Perhaps he would get the passengers to sing along with him.

He tried to shed his melancholy. He was a famous person, whether he liked it or not, and he was not normally shy about his gifts. He was known on two continents as the gospel singer, the song leader and soloist working with Dwight L. Moody, who was surely the greatest evangelist of the day. Perhaps God had intended it this way for him to be in this place, on this boat, at this particular time.

*“I thought I would sing a carol or two.”* Then he added, *“But somehow I feel I should sing another song.”*

*“Sing one of your own songs!”* shouted someone unseen. *“Sing ‘The Ninety-And-Nine!’”* commanded another.

*“No, thank you very much, but I know what I must sing.”* He was smiling broadly now, feeling much better about himself and the situation, enjoying his congregation. *“I shall sing a song by William Bradbury. And if you know it, as I’m sure many of you do, hum along with me.”*

Sankey began to sing,

*“Savior, like a shepherd lead us,  
Much we need Thy tender care;  
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,  
For our use Thy fold prepare:  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
Thou has bought us, Thine we are.”*

He sang all three verses. There was uncommon silence, and Ira Sankey felt it would be inappropriate to sing anything else. So he simply wished everyone a Merry Christmas, and the people murmured a greeting in return. The silence returned, and he was alone.

*“Your name is Ira Sankey?”*

"Yes." He recognized neither the voice nor the man.

The man came out of the shadows. He was about his own age, with a beard beginning to turn gray, and comfortably but not fastidiously dressed. Perhaps he was in sales.

"Were you ever in the Army, Mr. Sankey?"

"Yes, I was. I joined up in 1860."

"I wonder if you can remember back to 1862. Did you ever do guard duty, at night, in Maryland?"

"Yes, I did!" Sankey felt a stab of memory and excitement. "It might have been at Sharpsburg."

"I was in the Army, too. The Confederate Army. And I saw you that night."

Sankey looked at him warily.

"You were parading in your blue uniform. Had you in my sights, you standing there in the light of the full moon, which was right foolish of you, you know." The man paused. "Then you began to sing."

Amazingly, Sankey remembered.

"You sang the same song you sang tonight, 'Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us.'"

"I remember."

"My mother sang that song a lot, but I never expected any soldier to be singing it at midnight on guard duty. Especially a Union soldier." The man sighed. "Obviously I didn't shoot you."

"And obviously I am grateful." Sankey smiled.

"I always wondered who you were. Who it was I didn't kill that night, on account of his singing an old Sunday school song."

Sankey just shook his head.

"Frankly, up until tonight, the name of Ira Sankey wouldn't have meant much to me. Guess I don't read the paper like I should. I didn't know you'd turn out to be so famous!" The man smiled for the first time. "but I reckon I would have recognized the voice and the song any place."

Sankey reflected on what might have been.

"Do you think we could talk a mite?" asked the man. "I think you owe it to me. Very little has gone right for me. Not before the war. Not during it. And not since."

Ira Sankey put an arm around his former enemy. They found a place in a quiet corner of the deck to sit and chat. Sankey's impatience and anger had passed. He no longer fretted that he might be delayed in seeing his family. Christmas would soon be here. It always came but sometimes in the strangest of ways.

The night was still warm but it seemed filled with brighter stars. Sankey even thought he heard the sound of angels' voices: singing of course, and singing the Good News.

— Selected

## "The Joy of Giving- Santa Claus"

Long ago, in the country of Lycia, there lived a nobleman who had three daughters. He was a good, kind father and, while his daughters were young, he was able to give them all the things they needed because he was very rich.

When the girls grew up, troubles fell on the family and their father lost all his money. The family became so poor that often the girls did not have enough to eat and had to go to bed without any supper.

The time came when the girls wished to get married, but their parents told them sadly that they had no money for marriage, and this made the girls very unhappy.

In a monastery nearby there lived a saintly man called Nicholas. He heard about the plight of this family and was very sorry for them. His parents had left him some money when they died, but he felt it would be wrong to use it for himself. He loved people, because he loved Jesus, and he wanted to do the sort of things Jesus would do.

'Now there is a family I should help,' thought Nicholas, 'but I must do it without them seeing me or they will want to thank me. God has entrusted my money to me so that I can help others. It is God whom they must thank.'

So he went to his treasure chest and counted out a bag of gold coins. He waited until it was evening and then he set off into the darkness.

As he drew near the nobleman's house he saw, by the light of the moon, that one of the windows was open. He dropped the bag of gold through the open window, and turned and hurried away.

When the nobleman found the bag of gold on the floor he was very surprised.

'Wherever can this have come from?' he asked, but as no one had seen Nicholas, no one could tell him.

'It must be a gift from a very kind person.' He thought and, because he too was kind, he gave the gold to his eldest daughter. She was delighted. Now she had money and could marry.

A few nights later Nicholas went to the house again with a second bag of gold, and dropped it through the open window as before. Again he made sure no one saw him, and when the nobleman found the gold he was more puzzled than ever. He gave the gift to his second daughter, and she was delighted: now she too would be able to marry. The nobleman decided he would keep watch for the next few nights to see if he could discover who his kind friend was.

When Nicholas came for the third time, the girls' father was ready for him. Just as Nicholas was turning to go, the nobleman appeared out of the shadows and caught hold of his robe. He drew him into the moonlight.

'Why! It's Nicholas, the servant of God!' he exclaimed in amazement. 'Why do you hide yourself away like this?'

Nicholas replied that he did not want the world to praise him for his deeds. 'It is God who sent me to you, for he put the thoughts into my mind. You must give him the thanks,' he finished.

## CHRIST IS VICTOR

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So the nobleman and his wife had the joy of giving all three daughters a lovely wedding; and how happy they all were! But the one who had the greatest happiness of all was Nicholas himself, because he had discovered that there is no higher joy than in making others happy.

Later, Nicholas became Bishop of Myra, and spent his life helping others. Many years after he died, he was made a saint, and is now called Saint Nicholas.

The story of Saint Nicholas spread across the world and other people wanted to copy his good deeds. So when children receive presents at Christmas, and no one sees who brings them, it is said that Santa Claus has brought them. Santa Claus is another name for Saint Nicholas and, dressed in his red robes, he is known the world over. Some call him Father Christmas, but whatever Saint Nicholas is called, his kind actions are remembered as people copy his deeds and leave presents without being seen to do so.

— Selected

## “The Three Wise Women”

The three wise men: Casper, Melchior, Balthasar. They’re beloved characters in the traditional Christmas story. Through the centuries, these mysterious figures have captured our imaginations and inspired us to “follow the star” on our own spiritual journey to Bethlehem. Of course, we don’t really know what their names were, or even that there were, in fact, three of them.

We do know, however, that there were three wise women: Mary, Elizabeth and Anna—three very different women, in different ages and stages of life. Yet they were all women who “Feared the Lord.” And each one played a crucial role in the events of the true Christmas story. Each one, in her own way, set a powerful example for us to follow today.

### Mary

She was a young woman, a teenager, about to be married. She stood at the threshold, full of hopes and dreams for her future. Most of her

time was spent preparing for her wedding. When the angel appeared, he brought a message that would change her life forever. He told Mary that she was “highly favored.” God had chosen her to bear His Son. From now on, all generations would call her blessed.

What an awesome privilege! What an incredible responsibility.

At that moment, Mary could not have imagined all that it would entail. She asked a natural question: “How can this be?” We can tell from the angel’s gentle reply that it was not asked in doubt or skepticism. Mary didn’t demand a sign, some sort of proof or additional confirmation. She voiced no complaint at the total disruption of her life. She knew now that things would not turn out the way she had planned at all. But in her heart, there was no resistance, no rebellion. Just a sweet, simple submission—surrender to the will of God.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” she replied. “May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38).

In essence, she told the angel that God could use her in any way He chose, because she was a willing vessel, fully available to Him. How that must have blessed the heart of God! No wonder He chose this precious young woman to be the mother of His Son.

God is still looking for people who, like Mary, will make themselves fully available to Him. If we are willing to surrender our hearts, our hopes, our dreams, He says He will use us to accomplish great and mighty things.

### Elizabeth

She was barren in a culture in which a woman’s worth was measured by the number of children she produced. She was infertile at a time when an inability to bear children was seen as a sign of God’s judgment—a curse. She and her husband had prayed fervently for a child, but now her childbearing years had passed. Elizabeth had every reason to be bitter, but instead she followed God’s commandments blamelessly (Luke 1:6). She continued to walk in faithful obedience, even when she didn’t understand His will. She continued to pour out her heart to Him, even when it seemed He wasn’t listening.

Then miraculously, God answered her prayers and Elizabeth conceived a child in her old age. She knew it was the hand of God supernaturally intervening in her life. When her kinswoman Mary arrived for an unexpected visit, Elizabeth knew why she had come. Elizabeth had heard God’s voice speaking to her. She was attuned to His Spirit.

With the authority of a woman who has experienced God’s faithfulness, she exclaimed to Mary, “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished” (Luke 1:45).

In that instant, Elizabeth took on the role of a spiritual mother or godly mentor. She gave a word of encouragement to a young woman who felt very much alone. Elizabeth affirmed Mary and confirmed the word of the Lord to her. If Mary had any doubts or fears, Elizabeth dispelled them with a joyous reminder of God’s love and faithfulness.

Like Elizabeth, we need to let our heartbreaks draw us closer to God instead of allowing them to drive us away. We need to listen for His voice and be sensitive to His leading. And we need to take advantage of every opportunity to encourage and affirm those who are younger in the faith. We can share from our own personal experience that God is faithful.

### Anna

At 84, she was coming to the end of her life. No doubt Anna had already outlived most of her friends and relatives. Her own husband had died more than 60 years earlier, seven years after

... “WISE” CON’T ON PAGE 4

**REALITY CHECK!**

QUALITY COUNTS: “QUALITY IS NEVER AN ACCIDENT; IT IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF HIGH INTENTION, SINCERE EFFORT, INTELLIGENT DIRECTION AND SKILLFUL EXECUTION; IT REPRESENTS THE WISE CHOICE OF MANY ALTERNATIVES.”

“WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL BREAK ONE OF THESE LEAST COMMANDMENTS, AND SHALL TEACH MEN SO, HE SHALL BE CALLED THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: BUT WHOSOEVER SHALL DO AND TEACH [THEM], THE SAME SHALL BE CALLED GREAT IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”- MATTHEW 5:19

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... **“SUN” FROM PAGE 1**  
penetrating Light. “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” How true it is!

The long expected Messiah, who had already sent His rays by the prophets, has come. When Christ came the pure light came. The red glow, before the sun comes into view, is not the pure light. Even the sun appears red at the horizon because the light cornea beams through the dusty atmosphere of the surface of the earth. When the prophets had spoken the earth received a part of the light. We get the pure light when the sun comes up higher. We cannot look at the sun when it comes overhead.

The corrupt priesthood had to hide its face and could not see Jesus. They wanted to kill Him and finish Him off. But human society felt the warmth of His light. Those who received His rays retained them. The words of Jesus stored up in the Bible still energize people. If we meditate on them, the Sun of righteousness rises in our hearts. As you study the Bible more and more you feel His warmth more and more. Healing also takes place.

When a man has the true righteousness of God, he ultimately treads down the enemies of righteousness. Jesus was crucified, but who stands condemned now? Those that condemned Him stand condemned now. Healing is automatic when we walk close to the Lord.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” (Malachi 4:5) John the Baptist was Elijah. He came before Christ. He came with the spirit of Elijah. When he preached the people trembled. He did not care for food nor dress. He ate wild food and wore very rough clothes and lived by river Jordan. The Jordan flows 600 feet below sea level and at the dead sea it is 1,300 feet below sea level. In the Jordan valley there were caves in which there were a number of Jewish priests, but only John the Baptist had the vision of Christ, and began to preach the gospel. People flocked to hear him. He preached and baptized. He said he was not the Christ. When he saw Jesus he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh

away the sin of the world.” Jesus came when the nation was astir by the preaching of John the Baptist.

When Christian living goes down, it is the family that is hit; the unifying love and discipline fail and children turn against parents; Homes are ruined. During those 400 years between the Old and New Testaments many set-backs came to the Jewish religion.

The greatest hindrance to the preaching of John the Baptist was the sinful life of Herod, who pretended to promote the Jewish religion by building them synagogues, while living in overt sin. He had to go boldly and rebuke this big man. It meant imprisonment and death to him but the whole country felt the impact of this rebuke.

After this came Jesus, who brought them the perfect Truth. The world never heard such words or saw such a consistent life. People thronged to hear Him and be healed. Have you found the key to this powerful life?

May Jesus put the principle of the new life and the resurrection power into us!

—N. Daniel

... **“WISE” FROM PAGE 3**

they were married. There were no young children to care for. For whatever reason, she never remarried. The culture didn't allow a woman to pursue a career. So Anna had a lot of time on her hands.

She could have spent that time living in the past and longing for the good old days. She could have become the proverbial busybody—the woman who goes from house to house spreading gossip and sticking her nose into other people's business. She could have sat on the porch complaining to her neighbors about all her aches and pains and the problems that come with growing older. But she didn't.

Instead, Anna devoted herself to loving God. Just loving God. Spending time in His presence. As the years went by, she devoted more and more of herself to Him. “She never left the temple but

worshiped night and day, fasting and praying” (Luke 2:37).

Scripture tells us that God honors those who honor Him. He gave His servant Anna the privilege of living to see what men of old had died waiting for: the coming of the Messiah. She was there in the temple, where she always was, when His baby dedication took place. She responded to the blessed event in the same way she always did. “She gave thanks” (Luke 2:38). Then she told everybody who would listen about the goodness and greatness of our God.

Anna was a woman who made the best out of a bad situation. She counted her blessings. As a result, her heart overflowed with gratitude to God. Talk about growing old gracefully! Anna shows us that no matter how old we get, we don't ever have to retire from our walk with God. We don't have to grow bitter; we can grow better. We can choose to count our blessings, not our heartaches. We can always give thanks.

The Three Wise Women: Mary, Elizabeth and Anna. Just as the Wise Men followed the star, we can follow the shining examples of these women who lived lives “holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1). A popular Christmas card proclaims, “Wise Men still seek Him.” The truth is, wise women still seek Him, too!

—Christin Ditchfield

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