



The Heavens Declare the Glory of God-
How Does God care about you? Would He ever pay you a visit? Do you yearn for peace on earth and favor with God? Find out how the heavens declare the glory of God.

PAGE 1

Jesus Christ: Son of the Highest-
Angels tell about Him, worship Him, serve Him. Do you see who Jesus is? Do you believe in Him?

PAGE 5

Pastors' Perspective
A Case for Greek Studies-
How seriously do we take the doctrine of verbal inspiration? What part should this doctrine play in informing preachers and Bible teachers? Find out.

PAGE 8

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The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

By Dr. Mary Craig



Have you ever felt like you were on the outside looking in on another world? Have you felt rejected and even despised because of what you do for a living, even if it is in fact honorable? Have you wondered if God cares about you, knows you're even alive on planet earth, or is too busy to pay you a visit? Do you yearn for peace on earth and favor with God?



Since 27 B. C. the Pax Romana ensured the absence of war, but as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, "While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace."

Much like today, in what Galatians calls "the fullness of times," people searched for peace. God's peace,



shalom, means more than the absence of war. It describes well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and wholeness. It has more to do with character even in the midst of conflict.

The time of Jesus' birth was a time of high taxes, unemployment, failing morals, a military state, life on the dole. It was a time of Roman law, Greek philosophy, and a Jewish religious life with lots of rules and regulations. The world was in a moral darkness, a dark night of the soul.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined...For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even Forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Isaiah 9.2, 6, 7

Luke 2. 1-20. Long ago and far away Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken of his empire,

the Roman Empire. With those few words, people had their lives disrupted. Everyone had to go to his own town to register.

Joseph lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, but because he was of the house and line of David, he had to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, to register for the census. Mary went with him, very pregnant-very. They get to Bethlehem (house of bread), but there's no more room at the inn. It ends up that the Child is born in either a stable or a cave, because we are told that Mary wrapped her Firstborn in cloths and placed Him in a manger, an animal's feeding trough.



What a strange birthing room, especially when we look at what follows! Some think such inns would have been either the second story of a house that housed animals below or a one-story building with an adjacent stable. Whatever it was, we can agree it wasn't any palace or place of prominence. Who noticed? Who cared?

At the same time, and that evening, shepherds were abiding in fields in the same region. They were on the night watch, keeping watch over their flocks. That was their job and their shift. It's dark, it's ordinary, and it's dull. Were they talking about King David, a shepherd of Israel? Were they thinking about the prophecies of a promised Messiah? There hadn't been a true prophet of God since Malachi. Maybe they discussed politics and life under Caesar's regime. Maybe they didn't care out there on the hills of Judea under the stars.

Back then, shepherds were despised by the orthodox religious people because they couldn't keep the details of the ceremonial law. They failed the "hand-washing test" and other rules and regulations imposed by the religious community. So, they were ritually unclean. "Good" people kind of hoped they didn't exist, except they were taking care of sheep and lambs, whose life-blood would mean atonement for their sins.

Taking care of sheep is a lot of work. I've only visited sheep farms in England and New Zealand, but what I

■ Manger Scene



saw was enough to tell me how much work and love has to go into it. Those sheep seem to like to stray, and sometimes they're smelly. They keep everyone busy, from the shepherds to the sheep dogs. No wonder Scripture says these shepherds were guarding the guard.

All of a sudden the angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord haloed them. And we are talking Fear! Mega fear.

It can be frightening to realize that God is real, that He is holy, that He is here, that He has a Voice, that your life has just been interrupted and will be forever changed. The questions will come later. For now, you just hang on and experience the encounter of a lifetime.

The atmosphere is electric with energy as the angel delivers his message and the purpose of his mission: Now remember, in the first century, shepherds were

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people. For unto you was born this day in the city of David a Savior, which
Is Christ [the] Lord. And this to you the sign: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

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seen as shiftless, dishonest people leading a nomadic lifestyle not trusted and not condoned. So we have shepherds of shaky reputation shaking in the midst of the glory of angels. Don't get the idea that they could be fooled. Shepherds deal with the grit of life. And now they were squaring off with a great declaration and revelation of truth.

The message isn't just for them, although it's remarkable that Yah Veh chose to reveal the birth of Messiah Adonay to them. Remarkable, until we also remember that King David was a man after God's own heart and the prophetic word promised that the Messiah would be the son of David and born in Bethlehem. (**Micah 5.2; Isaiah 9.6, 7**)

What do we have here? We have the glory of the Lord shining round about like a halo. We have good news. We have news so good it is meant to fill us with great joy. And it's for all the people. What's the good news? A Savior has been born in David's city, Bethlehem, the house of bread, and this Savior is Christ Lord, meaning Christ and Lord or Christ who is the Lord.

You don't have to be prominent in the world to receive revelation from God. God chooses those to whom He will reveal Himself. He will interrupt your life to do it, and you won't be able to stop the glory of His appearing. He will bring good news to you that will fill you with great joy.

Want in on it? This Child is called the Christ Child because He is the Savior-Messiah and He is Lord. It's an angel of the Lord who brings the message. The

glory of the Lord haloed the shepherds. The babe of Bethlehem is also Lord? Yes. The Christ, the Anointed One, the Promised Messiah now born is God. This Savior is God Incarnate, the Sovereign not just of men but of angels as well, Lord of heaven and earth.



How do we know this Savior is the promised Messiah, the topic of OT prophecies? Here's some help, but I won't do your homework for you: **Luke 1.32, 33; Luke 1.46-55; Luke 1.68-76; Luke 2.11, 29-32, 38; Matthew 1.16, 2.2, 2.11, 2.4, 2.6, 2.15, 23.**

It was fitting that Jesus, "[the] ruler who shall shepherd My people Israel" (**Micah 5.2**) would be revealed to shepherds out in the fields of Judea near Bethlehem. It also means we can look for God in ordinary things and find Him revealed to ordinary people. The great joy of the good news is that

at long last a Savior has come, God Incarnate, who will live the life of obedience as the Servant of Israel and die the death, the penalty of sin, and rise from the dead all according to the Scriptures to save His people from their sins. The good news is that sins can be forgiven as the Lamb of God became the living sacrifice for sin, His Blood shed for the remission of sins and to allow access into the Holy of Holies.

Check it out.

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The religious community let these shepherds know daily that they were unclean and denied access to the worship of God. But God looks for those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Out there on those hills, were they seeking? Yearning for the Creator? Asking for a Savior? We are all born in an estate of sin and misery, cast out from the presence of the Almighty. But things are changing.

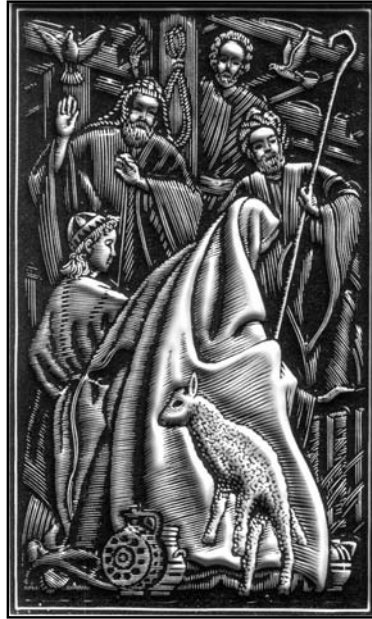
The angels came with a proclamation. They also came with the sign, a point of identification. "You shall find" meant these shepherds would surely find. Then it gets so exciting to the holy host of heaven that:

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and upon the earth peace among men of good pleasure.

The angelic host give God honor for what is taking place. All of heaven is rejoicing at the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. Salvation has come in the Person of Jesus Christ. This means peace on earth among men on whom God's favor rests. In other words, those who respond to God's gracious gift, Messiah Adonay, will be numbered among God's chosen people and find peace.

My husband, Rev. Jim Craig, noted: "Real peace on earth exists only among those who are the subject of God's good will, who are characterized by good will toward God and man, and who are among men in whom God is well pleased." Jesus is God's beloved Son is whom He is well pleased. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who breaks down the walls of alienation. In Christ, we have peace.

Jesus, Yeshua, this Savior, is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. The angels go back into the heavens, and now the shepherds whose dark night has just been flooded with the light of the glorious gospel of Christ want to go and see this thing which the Lord has made known unto them. They take off in the first Christmas rush to Bethlehem, and find things exactly as the angel had told them. There it is: Mary and Joseph and the babe, lying in a manger.



Okay! God has interrupted life. There's **glory, good news, great joy**. There's **proclamation, praise**, a point of identification, and a promise of peace. We're invited to **go and see**. We can be included in those of God's chosen people.

The shepherds listened. Then they must have believed because they wanted to go and see for themselves. Their faith led to obedience so that they did find Jesus. And what they saw, they had to share with anyone who would listen. They told people what the angels told them, all about their trip to Bethlehem, and what they

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

found. People wondered. Mary pondered.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "This little planet of ours was made to burn with a superior light among its sister stars while the Creator sojourned here in human form. If for the first time you had heard of the visit of the Incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout eternity. This is the heart of the gospel—the incomparable fact of the incarnation of the Son of God, His dwelling upon the earth, and His presentation of Himself as a sacrifice unto God for the sins of mankind."

The shepherds returned to their work changed men. They had seen the Savior face to face, in fact seen the Father in seeing the Son. Already, Jesus was turning the world upside down. He was now connected to some shepherds watching sheep in the night watches. They were now connected to God's Son, His passion and His peace. They received the Promised One, the Anointed One, the Sovereign One.

The heavens declare the glory of God. Do you? Are you willing to go and see for yourself if Jesus is the Savior, Messiah Adonay? Do you have the courage to pray and ask the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ if the things written in the Scriptures are true? Will you receive Jesus as your own Savior and Lord by asking Him into your heart and life? Jesus isn't a baby any more. His mission in coming to earth has been finished, fulfilled. He's in heaven now seated at the right hand of the Almighty, with all power and all authority given unto Him. But all you need to do is ask. Ask Him for grace to believe, grace to repent of your sins, grace to be saved, grace to follow Him, grace to have revealed to you what angels know and shepherds came to see.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. ■

Jesus Christ: Son of the Highest

By Dr. Mary Craig.



Jesus Christ, born of a woman, born under the law, laid in a manger in the city of David, was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. **Do you see Him?** When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son to redeem those who were under the law. (**Galatians 4.4, 5**)

Jesus Christ, named according to the word of Gabriel to Mary (**Luke 1.31**) and to Joseph (**Matthew 1.21**), fulfilled the prophetic word. *“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”* (**Luke 1.32, 33**)

God spoke through His prophets. He sent angels with messages. And now, the Father remembers His holy covenant and His promised mercy. He sends His Son to grant that His own, being delivered from the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives. (**Luke 1.72-75**)

Immanuel, God with us, entered history in the days of Herod the king (**Matthew 2.1**). He was in the beginning with God. Indeed, all things were made through Him. (**John 1.2, 3**) *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.* (**Colossians 1.15, 16 NKJV**)

The eternal, ultimate expression of God, the Word, became flesh to dwell among us and to declare to us the Father. God has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, the supreme revelation. (**Hebrews 1.1, 2**) **Are you listening?**

Jesus Christ came to purge our sins and, after living, dying, and being raised from the dead, to ascend into

heaven. To which of the angels did God ever say: Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool? Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation. (**Hebrews 1.13, 14**) As Man and as God, Jesus Christ is superior to angels, indeed pre-eminent.



Angels tell about Him, worship Him, serve Him. His Name never changed. He neither swerved from nor altered His destiny. He came to save His people from their sins. He came that we might have life. He knew of which He spoke. Yet He says,

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must

the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (**John 3.13-18**)

Do you believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God? His name means “the Lord is Salvation.” As Christ, He is the Anointed One, the promised Messiah. He is Alpha and Omega, the Faithful Amen, Creator, Shepherd, Redeemer, Lamb of God, Lion of Judah, the Ancient of Days, Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The voice of many angels



Continued on page 11

Pastors' Perspective

A Case for Greek Studies

By Rev. Jim Craig



The Bible claims verbal inspiration for itself because the Bible writers claim verbal inspiration for themselves. Verbal inspiration means this: that each word in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts was chosen out of the writers' vocabulary by God the Holy Spirit. This course of action was taken for the purpose of conveying the truth that God desired His people to have.

How seriously do we take the doctrine of verbal inspiration? Are we consistent in our efforts to rely upon this truth? Do we truly hold to this doctrine and carry it out in practice? When teaching from the Scriptures, do we tend to trust exclusively in what we have read about various passages, relying alone on what others have said concerning them? Does verbal inspiration play a major part in the method we use to feed the Lord's sheep? If this doctrine is true and we believe it, we should be compelled to apply our God given skills to learn the intended meaning of every word, phrase, and sentence.

On the other hand, if we were to put aside the doctrine of verbal inspiration of the original texts, then we would be less confined in our responsibility to interpret the Scriptures. We could express our own personal ideas about what we think we find in the sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books of the Bible. That would certainly give us more freedom and make biblical interpretation a lot less complicated, especially when we encounter the more difficult passages. But, imagine how extensive the costs would be to our hearers, the kingdom of God, and to us.

According to Peter's description (**2 Peter 1.21**), it was *"through the personal agency of the Holy Spirit being brought forward in speech, men spoke from God."* That is to say, these men spoke from God as a source of their words. Speaking is always done through the use of words, whatever the language, so we can say that the individuals who spoke and recorded these words had the words given to them by God.

Another biblical claim for verbal inspiration of the original manuscripts is found in **1 Corinthians 2.13**. Verse 10 tells us of the act of God the Holy Spirit imparting truth to the writers. It also tells that this truth is incapable of being discovered by man's unaided reason. The "imparting" is described by a certain

Greek word which refers to the act of uncovering something that was previously hidden from view. We usually see this word (αποκαλυπτω) translated as "revelation" in the English language. The last book of our Bible is titled **Αποκαλυψις Ιωαννου**, which literally means: the act of imparting (uncovering), by John, that which was previously hidden from view.



■ Rev. Jim Craig

Now in order to capture more detail about the process by which these writers penned the truth, we must dig a little deeper. By learning about how the process is described we can get a more vivid glimpse of its detail. The Apostle Paul

describes the process by which the writers wrote down that truth by using a key word (συγκρινω) to describe the essence of it. This word means, "to judge together with," in other words, "to judge something by placing it next to, and comparing it with, another thing to determine a near as possible match." We are used to calling the other thing used to compare with, a "criterion" or a "standard."

Here is how the process played out in the practical sense. The New Testament writers, having been given the truth in their minds, searched their Greek vocabularies for the exact Greek word that would best convey the truth God had given them. The search was not without well-timed divine help. Led by the Holy Spirit, the writer would compare his own thoughts expressing a particular truth with certain Greek words. If the match was not adequate, the word was discarded and the process continued until the Holy Spirit assured the writer that he had selected the correct word. I must point out that this process does seem mechanical when we attempt to describe it in detail. But in actuality, the process would have been extremely fluid, transparent and spiritual.



In effect, the entire process was one of matching Spirit-taught words with spiritual truth. The writers were, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, permitted free play of their personalities and their mental processes, learning and experiences. They were neither limited to choosing words their learning alone led them to select, nor were they confined to the dictation of words by the Holy Spirit. Instead, they chose words to which the Holy Spirit led them.

Based upon my own personal experience and the testimony of many other pastors and teachers, I can assure you of this; once you have discovered the wealth and joy of finding precise expressions of God's truth from the original Greek New Testament, you will never be the same. You will no longer be satisfied with skimming over a passage in an English translation and giving your own general interpretation of it. You will no longer be satisfied with one particular commentary to the exclusion of others. You will want to allow each word and phrase to take you, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, where He will in the truth. Your confidence in the Lord's providence will build, that He has brought about an infallible transmission of the truth from His heart to the written manuscripts. Even if you do not immediately comprehend some of the truth brought out, you will be patient about shelving the issue until subsequent light of the Holy Spirit is shed upon it.

Not only has the Holy Spirit caused the truth of God to be written down, He also plays a vital part in making certain that we gain understanding by His present ministry as the interpreter of the Bible texts. Lest you think that applying yourself to the study of New Testament Greek is merely a lifeless and impractical academic discipline, take a closer look at what the great apostle Paul explains as he writes to the Greeks at Corinth. He says, "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto them, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Cor 2.14).

The word translated into English as "natural" is a Greek word originally coined by Aristotle to distinguish the noblest of men, made powerful by his desires of the soul (pleasures of the soul, constructive ambition, desire for knowledge, etc.), from the powerless of men, rendered powerless by his desire to please the body (the man who is without power or command over himself or his passions). The Corinthian Greeks understood Paul's meaning very clearly. The "natural" man Paul was speaking of was the unregenerate man at his best, not the average unsaved man, nor unsaved humanity as a whole. Paul



was referring to the highly trained yet unsaved man of Greek scholarship, skilled in Greek philosophy and rhetoric, who has a well-trained and keen mind, the man who is actuated by the higher thoughts and aims of the natural life. Paul was emphasizing the biblical truth that even highly trained scholars are just as helpless as any other unsaved person to understand the deep things of God. Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, scholarship is unable to work successfully in the Greek New Testament, the Word of God. (You tell me; is this truth preachable?)

New Testament Greek is neither a special Holy Spirit language, nor is it what is known as Classical Greek. It was the every day, ordinary, common language of its time. The Greek of the New Testament is the same as the international, Koine Greek of the Roman world. It was the Greek spoken in ordinary conversation by most and the common means of communication by many who used it as their second language. The history of the Greek language extends back to about 1500 B.C. But, the period of history in which the Koine Greek was the common or universal language extended from 330 B.C. to A.D.330. The historical marker of its universal beginning was at the time of the Alexandrian conquests about 330 B.C. The division of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Byzantine period in A.D. 330 marked the progression of the Koine into Byzantine Greek (A.D.330 to 1453) and eventually to the Modern Greek (1453 to the present).

The New Testament writers intended their words to be clearly and accurately understood. Therefore, they had to follow the grammar and syntax of the Greek of the first century world. During this period the Greek language was freely used and understood throughout the civilized world. The vocabulary, phrasings, structure and idioms were all well established. In all points, Koine Greek is a language that is extremely superior to our English language. It is breathtakingly expressive and precise, with enormous flexibility that made it possible to vividly convey the thoughts of its writers with no less than pictorial clarity. When interpreting the Greek text and proceeding closely to the time proven rules of Greek grammar and syntax, the integrity of the task becomes almost as exact a science as that of mathematics. Every word patiently awaits you to discover that it is alive with divine life because chosen by the Holy Spirit and kindled with divine fire from the altars of heaven.

If you are a pastor or a Bible teacher and you think

this brief article is speaking to you about possibly learning New Testament Greek, let me know. Maybe you already have some training in it. Maybe you have absolutely no idea of what you have been missing. Whatever your situation, if you are sensing a serious tug from the Lord that you should learn more, possibly

even begin studying Greek, contact me. I am an experienced Greek teacher who, with God's help, plans to begin a New Testament Greek class the first part of 2003 at the **Craighouse** in Pompano Beach, FL.
Rev. JimCraig (jimc800@aol.com) ■

Merry Christmas



Craighouse

Continued from page 5

and living creatures say with a loud voice:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! (**Revelation 5.12**)

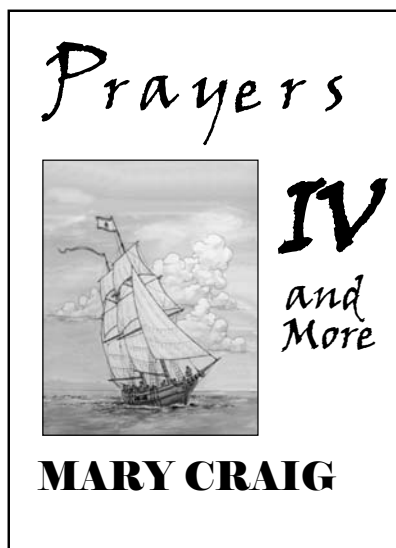
In that humility of incarnation, in that humility of the servant-son, in that obedience to the point of death on the cross, when He had by Himself purged our sins, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (**Hebrews 1.3, 4**)

A more excellent name. The supreme revelation. Indeed, God's final word to humanity. Kings came from afar to kneel before Him. Angels bow before Him. Demons know this Jesus of Nazareth as the Holy One of God and do as He commands. All of creation stands at attention for His word.

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