



December 2017

A Message of Life Ministries Newsletter

### Christmas Greetings

We at Message of Life want to wish you a blessed Christmas and a wonderful new year. We can rejoice that the Father sent the Son to give believers life eternal and an eternal message. What a privilege to be children of the King, the One whose birth we celebrate at this time.

### The Born King

Explanations of Matthew 2:2 tend to focus on Herod's mindset as he heard the wise men's question: "Where is He who has been born king of the Judeans?" (Matthew 2:2a).

Herod clearly was not in the Judean royal lineage. These words triggered fear in him. A Judean of the royal lineage would have a greater claim to the throne. Knowing Herod's thinking sufficiently explains his efforts to kill Jesus, but fails to account for how the wise men worded the initial question.

They did not ask, "Where is He who has been born prince of the Judeans [who will grow up to be king]?" Jesus was not a born prince, but a born king. Judah lacked a king since 597 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar replaced Jehoiachin (Judah's last king) with Zedekiah. Now, Jeremiah 22:30 says that no descendant of Jehoiachin (nicknamed Coniah) would ever reign over Judah. Joseph (Jesus' adopted father) had descended from Jeconiah, so he would never be king. However, Jesus (a descendant of David via Mary, per Luke 3) will indeed reign in Jerusalem over Judea, Israel, and the whole world. He escapes the curse of Coniah through the virgin birth.

Recapping the main point, most kings are born as princes. Jesus was a born king. How did the wise men know He was more than a prince? That was no lucky guess. More likely, God revealed Jesus' identity as a born king. Matthew 2:12 says that God warned them in a dream to avoid seeing Herod as they went home. Perhaps He revealed truth before they left Babylon.

They may have been Diaspora Judeans in Babylon, looking for their Messiah. Perhaps they knew Isaiah 9:6 and even Micah 5:2 (which says where He was to be born—but does not say where He would have lived at the time of the wise men's visit—almost two years after His birth. They found the One born king of the Judeans.

None of us saw the baby lying in a manger in Bethlehem, but we certainly rejoice that He came to earth. He came to give His life that we could live with Him for all eternity. What a message He has given us to share with a lost world.

### Marana tha: 1 Corinthians 16:22

Having a seven-letter Finnish last name means people puzzle over how to say or spell it. My parents anglicized the pronunciation after leaving northern Minnesota. Even so, some struggle with its spelling and pronunciation (even after it was simplified). Fifty years ago, my enjoyment of word-plays (inherited from Mom) yielded a way to help people spell our last name. The girl's name Melanie resembles our last name. When anglicized, the sound of each letter is the same as for Melanie (as seen below).

Mela-nie Mela-nie

Nie-melä

Paul also liked word-plays. That is clear if we transliterate a few words in 1 Corinthians 16:22 (*anathema* and *Marana tha*):

"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. *Marana* [our Lord,] *tha* [come]."

The last two words make a word-play, similar to Melanie and Niemelä. Note the pairing of underlined letters in the words:

ANATHEMA

MARANATH A

I always wondered why Paul used an Aramaic phrase (*Marana tha*), rather than using Greek words (*Kurie, erchou* = "Lord, come"). See Rev 22:20b, "Come, Lord Jesus." The spelling similarities between *anathema* and *Marana tha* underscore Paul's point: Believers who do not love the Lord—welcoming His return—find themselves with a curse, and not with the Lord's blessing. Why was Paul concerned that some Corinthian believers might not welcome the Lord's return and did not love the Lord? Though being eternally-secure believers, the Corinthians were divisive and self-centered, tending toward either license or legalism. Their strong self-focus prevented love for Jesus Christ. They would not welcome Him, because He certainly would not tell them, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What a tragedy.

Pronouncing anathema upon some Corinthians does not identify them as unbelievers—Paul calls them saints (1 Cor 1:2; 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15). *Young's Literal Translation* offers clear evidence against viewing this word as a condemnation to hell. Young's rendering of Acts 23:14b is so literal that English readers may puzzle over it, but citing it here may be profitable: "With an anathema we did anathematize ourselves—to taste nothing till we have killed Paul." To anathematize oneself would be to take an oath. It is doubtful that failing to cut Paul's life short led (continued on page 2)

## Maranatha (continued)

led any of them to death by starvation. Perhaps, they made additional offerings at the Temple or other self-imposed penalties for this unfulfilled oath to God. No one would seriously imagine that they said to themselves after their failure, "Now we will be eternally separated from God." *Anathema* appears in contexts of unrewardability (Rom 9:3; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:22; and Gal 1:8-9).

My rendering of 1 Cor 16:22 is:

"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *under* a curse. Lord, come."

I would add a marginal note about the word play, saying that it relates to discipline and unrewardability, not to a destiny in hell.

May we love the Lord and anticipate His coming for us in the rapture. We can expect Him at any time. Marana tha.

## A Wedding

Our older son, George, will soon marry. He knew his fiancée, Becky, in high school, when we lived in southern California. In recent years they became reacquainted and have had a long-distance courtship (with George in Tennessee and Becky living in Orange County). John will marry them in California. They will reside in Knoxville, where George is working on a PhD in electrical engineering.

Diane and John will see them during a ministry trip to Knoxville in January. As on any road trip, we will distribute *Living Waters*.

## Ministry and Travel

We mailed out twice as many Living Waters as last year: fifty-two boxes. That averages one box (of 100) each week. We also gave away two English pallets and one Spanish (10,000 booklets per pallet) at the GES Conference and in Texas.

Since our last *Lifeline*, John spoke at Grace Chapel in Orange, CA, on August 6. He also preached the Veterans' Day message at Crosspoint Community Church, Centennial, CO.

John will speak at Victor Street Bible Chapel, Dallas, TX, December 3, and at Berean Memorial Church, Dallas, TX, that evening. On December 10, he will preach at Grace Chapel, Orange, CA. On December 17, he will speak at Church of Hope, Laguna Woods, CA. He will also preach at Fellowship North in Knoxville, TN, on January 7.

John is teaching a Greek elective this semester. Our weekly Bible study in Lakewood is nearing its fourth anniversary. John teaches a twice-a-month lunchtime study at Crosspoint Community Church. He continues to assist in developing classes (on Romans) for the Denver Rescue Mission.

John is currently revising his translation of the Gospel of John. He has articles that will soon be published. He continues researching and writing.

## Prayer Requests

For travel mercies. For continued good health. For ministry opportunities. For completion of projects in a timely fashion. For continued financial support for Message of Life.



Some regulars for our weekly study



With Dr. Steve Speer and Dr. "Buddy" Greer at His Church



Speaking at Crosspoint Community Church



With Tommy (now with the Lord) and Cindy Wagner

### Lifeline

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