



BSM CONNECT

The Bible Society of Malaysia

The First Advent of Christ and the Gospels

3rd Issue 2015

Introduction

The Christmas 2015 is drawing near at this time. As we ponder over the first advent of Christ in history, a question comes to my mind: In what way is this Advent related to the Word of God as recorded in the Bible? God is a wise God and He does not show the first appearance of His son as coming down straight from heaven and consequently, out of the context of what He has said in the Bible. Instead, from the time of the Old Testament, he had revealed his plan in many and various ways by the prophets; but at the first Advent, God has spoken to us by a Son (Heb 1:1). The coming of Christ is not just a human event, but an essential and the most important episode of the salvation history of God, and this is precisely what God has said by His word: 'there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.' And Christ plays his role as the mediator between God and humankind through His Advent!

In this issue of the BSM Newsletter, we are going to explore a scope on how the four gospels say about the first Advent of Christ. I shall start with Mark, followed by Luke and Matthew and end with John focusing on how the Advent is related to the Word of God, especially the Four Gospels. Let us start with the Gospel of Mark.

Markan Proclamation of the Gospel

The Gospel of Mark begins with a proclamation and a citation of the Isaian prophecy. It starts with a non-verbal introductory statement, 'the beginning of the gospel or good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. As we can see, Mark begins his gospel just as a herald who speaks to the crowd the voices from the King. He is about to speak on the topic of a 'good news' or 'euangelion' in Greek.

The Greek word 'euangelion' is a multivalent word, meaning a word imbued with more than single significance. The first meaning is that it is a good message. In ancient world, when a city was under attack and sent soldiers to war field against the invaders. If the soldiers sent won the battle, they would send a message to bring this news of victory to the residents of the city. This message of overcoming the enemies is known as 'euangelion' or 'good news'. Besides this basic meaning, the word 'euangelion' is further expanded into the following elements of the same semantic domain: 'the messenger who carries the message', 'the victorious soldiers in the battle', 'the battle in which the ene-

emies were defeated', even 'the proclamation of the message' (See E. Stegemann, 'Euangelion', *ThZ* 63 (1, 2007)1-24).

Thus, in Markan gospel, the first Advent of Jesus Christ is indeed a proclamation of His victory. Expanding it further, Jesus Christ Himself is both 'the proclamation of the good news' and at the same time 'the good news'. Why did He come to us? Because He came to fulfil the Isaian prophecy in verse 2. To Mark, Jesus Christ is both a messenger and the message itself. That is not surprising, because Mark calls him 'the Son of God'. Being the 'Son', He is to present His Father's message and became a message itself at the first Advent. In the Roman world where Christ lived, it is known as 'pietas erga parentes' (obligation toward parent) and Cicero defines 'pietas' as the 'duty one has to perform by being a son, by being a citizen, and by being a servant'. The difference between Christ and the sons in Roman world is that Christ is not just the carrier of the message, He Himself is the Message (euangelion)!





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Lukan Angelic Melody

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In the record of the first Advent, Luke is unique in two aspects. First of the two, the role of the angels is very significant in the narrative of the birth of Christ. First, angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah the priest, the descendant of Aaron and prophesized to him the birth of his son John who would be like Elijah turning the hearts of the people back to God (Lk 1:13-19). Next, the same angel appeared to Mary the virgin proclaiming to her that a Davidic king would be born to her and she would name him 'Jesus' (Lk 1:26-35). Then on the first Christmas at the shepherd's field, an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and this is to be followed by a heavenly choir singing, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors'. It is interesting to note that in Greek, the word 'angelos' is also the same word for the 'messenger'. In other words, God was speaking through the angels at the first Advent!

The second uniqueness of Lukan record of the first Advent is the use of songs in conveying God's word in Lukan gospel. Many of the angelic messages are poetic in nature. This is to be seen in Gabriel's dialogue with Mary in Lk 1:26-33, 35, where the announcement of the birth is the focus. Next to this is the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat. It is recorded in Lk 1:46-55. In this song, Mary describes the One whom she believed as 'the Lord', 'God my Savior', 'the Mighty One'. The next in the line is the song of prophesy of Zechariah the priest, the father of John the Baptist. It is found in Lk 1:68-79 and is known as the 'Benedictus' in which he first praised the work of the Lord in the past (vv. 68-75) and then turned to the prophesy about the work and the role of his new born son, John (vv. 76-79). The next song, the shortest of all, is the famous angelic chorus, Lk 2:14, where 'glory' and 'peace' are the key words for the celebration of the birth of Christ. And the last song, in four verses, is known as the Nunc Dimitis or the Canticle of Simeon in Lk 2:29-32, in which Simeon testified the child as 'the salvation', and 'a light for revelation for the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel'.

The interminglement of the presenter (the angels) and the canticles with joyful message of 'God's salvation is here for all' brings out Lukan's Christological theme: 'Thus it becomes 'as the descendant of Adam being a human being would bring God's salvation to both the Gentiles and the Jews alike'. With him comes the glory of God and the peace that is given to those who receive the salvation. In fact, like the famous Christian song says, let us 'ascribe greatness to the Lord'!





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Matthean Messianic Fulfillment of the Prophets

Like the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of Matthew is unique in its presentation of the First Advent of the Messiah in that His coming is the fulfillment of the Prophets, the second Canon of the Hebrew Bible. The first prophet's word cited in this Gospel is found in Mt 1:22, 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel'. This is in fact a quotation from Isaiah 7:14, a sign that God has intervened in human affair by 'being with His people'. Then, there is a second prophetic citation in Mt 2:6 when the chief priests and scribes were asked about the birth place of the new Messiah. Here, they gave the answer from the prophet Micah, 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' It is from the fulfillment of the prophecies that this Gospel presents the new born child as 'the Messiah' (Mt

1:16) who was born in the genealogical line of King David and Patriarch Abraham (Mt 1:1). The Christological theme of Jesus' first Advent as 'the Messiah' promised by God through His word by the prophets is made clear from the beginning of the Genealogy (Mt 1:1-16) and the quotation-fulfilment announcement by the angels (Mt 1:22) and the Jewish religious leaders in those days (Mt 2:6), and it is also to be followed by the subsequent similar prophetic fulfilment expressions (such as Mt 2:15, 18, 23).

The Bible, in the form of God's word, comes to us with two important imperatives. First, it is to be read and to be believed. The prophesy-fulfilment of the Gospel of Matthew is expressed in a way that invites readers (both in NT era and in modern era) to put their faith in God and His words. Whatever God has said or is saying, He will watch over it until it is fulfilled (Jer 1:12). Secondly, it is written for us to act our part upon it. In the birth of the Messiah, the righteous man Joseph thought of dismissing his engaged wife Mary quietly, but when the Lord through the angel announced to him that the birth of this child is to fulfil the words of the Lord by Isaiah the prophet, he 'did as the angel of the Lord commanded him'. Similarly, the lives of the magi from East are also the lives of obedience. They saw the star and took the journey to visit the new born King. They prepared the gifts and gave them to Him. They had dream warning them not to return to see King Herod, and they went home by another road. Thus, in narrating the nativity of the Messianic King, the Gospel of Matthew invites us to put our faith in it and to do our part in fulfilling God's words in our lives.

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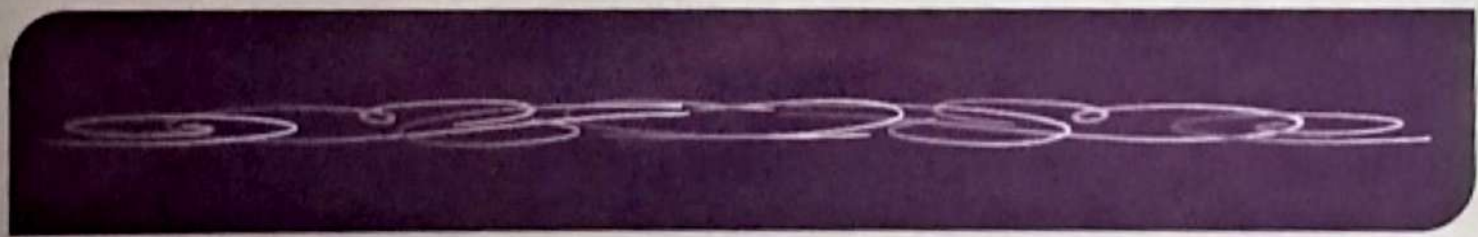
**Make Room
for More**

**The Joy that
you give to
others.**

**Is the joy that
comes back
to you.**

**John Greenleaf
Whittier**

Merry Christmas





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Dear friends of BSM, we ought to thank God for the written Bible is made available to us through the process of translation, so that we can read the words of the Lord in the language that we are familiar with. But are we reading it regularly? Do we read it with a heart to believe in it and with hands to do it? Let us be encouraged by the reading of the Gospels so that our faith will be strengthened and our love be made more fervent for the ministry of the Lord, just like Joseph the righteous man and the Magi the truth seeker.

Johannine Preexistent Logos

The meditation on the first Advent of Christ will not be complete without the reading of the Four Gospel, John. Of the four Gospels, two of them, Matthew and Luke write the event of the first Advent of Jesus Christ with the nativity narratives. On the other hand, the Gospel of Mark begins with the word 'gospel' (the Message and the Messenger), and the Gospel of John connect the first Advent with the Preexistent Logos (the Word). He begins with a profound statement regarding the Preexistent Logos: In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God (verse 1). Not only is this Logos preexistent with God, but he entered into human realm by becoming a flesh: The Logos became flesh and lived (or tabernacle) among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and glory. It is pertinent for us to observe from here the combination of the Logos, the glory and the unique sonship that makes the first Advent in its fullest expression. Christ came to us, because He is the preexistent Logos who was with God in the beginning. Christ came to us, so as to express the grace and the glory that belongs to Him as the Son of God. Christ came to us because He is the unique Son of the Father. After reading through the Prologue of the fourth Gospel, the readers should be able to identify the event of the First Advent as a continuity between the beginning of all things (Jn 1:1), the historical bestowment of the Torah through Moses (Jn 1:17) and the coming of Christ into the world (Jn 1:10-11).

Besides the ontological existence of the Christ as Logos, His first Advent take place with a divine purpose, that is, to give power for those who accepted Him, that is, those who believed in His name, to become the children of God (Jn 1:12) so that the supernatural birth of humankind is to be taken place in the world, the world that opposes Him.

Like John who was sent by God to testify to the light, we have a testifier in our midst. That is the Bible, the written word of God. By reading the written word of God, we marvel at the wonderful work of God in His creation and in His salvation, and we are taught that both His work of creation and salvation has been accomplished through His Son, Jesus Christ. The reading of the Bible during this Christmas season is indeed meaningful and important, as the Bible informs us: 'So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ' (in here, the word of Christ can also be taken as 'the word about Christ'). The Bible is worthy of reading because it tells us about Christ and because it is the word of Christ!

Blessed Christmas to you all: 'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isa 9:6)

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BIBLE SOCIETY of MALAYSIA

Sowing God's Word to Everyone in Every Way

Latest News

Visitors

1. Rev Khoi Lam Thang, the General Secretary of Myanmar Bible Society had visited our office on 18th September, with another local colleague. We have good time for fellowship and discussion for cooperation and partnership in the Bible ministry for the Myanmar workers here in Malaysia.



From the left: Rev Dr Daniel See, Rev Khoi Lam Thang, Rev Daniel Hrang Peng

2. Pastor and Mrs Justin and Jacquie Ryan of One Voice Ministries met with the Acting General Secretary on 11th November to discuss possible collaboration in literacy program and Manga Bibles distribution.

Visitation to Friends of BSM

Rev Dr Daniel, the Acting General Secretary had visited the following friends of BSM:

Pastor James Krishnan of Calvary Life Chapel Malacca on 8/9/2015.
Rev Chin Kim Fatt of Malacca Methodist Church on 9/9/2015
Rev Ronnie Chiu of Malacca Straits Baptist Church on 9/9/2015

Dr Daniel See expressed gratitude to them for their support of BSM ministry and shared with them the latest development of our translation projects.



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BSM PROJECTS

We BSM has a few ongoing translation projects, such as Iban Study Bible, Penan OT, Jahut OT. If your Church would like to participate and support our Bible ministry, we will be pleased to share with you about the bible Ministry at your Church.

Please send us a email to :

Rev Dr Daniel See,

Acting General Secretary

Email : agsbsm@gmail.com



From the left: Rev Dr Daniel See, Rev Chin Kim Fatt

Bible Sundays

Rev Dr Daniel See, the Acting General Secretary conducted Bible Sundays at the following churches:

Logos Presbyterian Church (PJ) on 27/09/2015

Taman Sentosa Chinese Methodist Church (two services) on 4/10/2015

Selayang Chinese Methodist Church (Revival Meeting and Bible Sunday) on 11/10/2015

Logos Presbyterian Church (Old Klang Road) on 25/10/2015

Meetings Aboard

Rev Dr Daniel had attended the following meetings locally on the behalf of BSM:

1-2 October, UBS SEA Mission Cooperation, Singapore

16 November, Tyndale House Dinner, PJ Hilton

Memoriam

We express our deepest condolence to Pastor Richard Yamin Samporoh, a member of BSM on the loss of his wife, Stemmah bte Sariau who was also our BM Translator, passed away on 18 Nov 2015.

May God grant the family peace and comfort.



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Advertisement

Dec 2015

The Bible Society of Malaysia is inviting applications for the posts of the General Secretary and the Administrative Manager. Both positions required baptized Christians with a keen sense of calling to serve the Bible cause.

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER

- handle overall administration of the office;
- handle accounts of the Society;
- Help to record minutes of EXCO meetings and AGM.
- Any other duties as may be required from time to time.

Requirements

- Previous experience in administration and book-keeping;
- Able to handle full set of accounts independently for audit purpose, GST, ROS, etc.;
- Good skill in correspondence. Fluent in spoken and written English.
- Knowledge of Mandarin and Malay will be an advantage;

GENERAL SECRETARY

- Promoting the Bible cause among the churches through Scripture engagement;
- Developing and maintaining close and effective relationships with all churches and Christian Organizations involved in Bible work;
- Planning and implementing fund raising programs in order to promote support by churches and individual Christians;
- Research into the Scripture needs of the people;
- Reporting to the Board regularly on all important aspects of the Society's activities.
- Carrying out other tasks as may from time to time be assigned by the Board.

Requirements

- Person of high stature, integrity and ability to inspire and motivate people;
- Good management skills and the ability to make decisions;
- Proven leadership within churches and the Christian community both in national and international level;
- Possess high level of communication skills and willing to travel regularly for meetings, church visits, etc.
- Theological trained preferred.

Remuneration will be according to qualification and experience.

Interested candidates can forward their resumes with recent photos and names of 2 referees, one of whom is your pastor where possible, to

The Hon. Secretary

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Or

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