

By Bessie Wilbon

## Sunday School Lesson

### INTRODUCTION

From the time man first sinned, God resolved upon a plan by which man could be saved. Sin had him in its grasp, making him incapable of doing anything that would relieve his plight. It is noteworthy that all of God's interventions in the history of man have been directly or indirectly related to this problem. Sin separates. It creates a deep chasm between the sinner and the sinless God. Man could not span the crevasse by his own effort. He could not close the gap. If man and God were ever to be reunited, it was clearly up to God to construct the "bridge over troubled waters."

That is what today's lesson is about. It teaches that God did not ask man to come to Him. He knew man could not do that. God came to man instead. He came in the form and likeness of a human being entering the world through the process of gestation in the womb of an earthly mother. How thankful we should be that God made such a tremendous overture toward us. We stand in open gratitude for one of the greatest sacrifices earth has ever known.

### THE LESSON

"This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly, so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a Son, and you will name him Jesus - because he will save his people from their sins.' Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'A virgin will become pregnant and have a son and he will be called Immanuel' (which means 'God is with us'). So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus." (Matthew 1:18-25).

The world has changed greatly in its attitude toward "unwed mothers." All kinds of problems have been created that touch almost every facet of life. But in the simple world of ancient Nazareth things were not so complex. The law was very plain and specific. The honest and obedient Jewish peasants felt an obligation to obey it. Matthew was a former tax collector for the Romans. As such he was accustomed to keeping records, and so his reporting the birth of Jesus comes directly to the point. Mary was a Jewish girl who grew up in the town of Nazareth. Like every other girl of that time she looked forward to marriage and children.

Joseph is designated as Mary's husband, although they had not yet come together. The betrothed and marriage customs of the Jews differed from ours, and it is important to keep that fact in mind. The real binding ceremony occurred at the betrothal. The couple then was legally, though not actually, husband and wife. Following the ceremony, the husband-elect went his way and usually spent a year in preparing their home. The bride-elect returned to her father's house and remained there until the time for the marriage feast. It was during this interim that Joseph learned that Mary was with child. If it could be proved that Mary had willingly been guilty of fornication, strict justice might call for punishment. But Joseph was not a vindictive man, nor did he wish to subject his wife to the sneers of the rude populace that would accompany a court trial or any public investigation of her conduct. For that reason he decided to divorce her in privacy.

The angelic prediction was a great comfort to Joseph. While he had not sired the Son who was to be brought forth, he could protect and nourish Him. The child, like John, was given his name before birth. He was to be called Jesus. This name means Savior, or Liberator, one who sets free. The bondage from which He would deliver was that of sin.

Jesus is the living link between the past and the present. He is the bridge between yesterday and today, between prediction and fulfillment. As one reads the Old Testament he realizes that a change is going to take place, and it is to involve someone who is to come. He will make all the hopes and dreams of man come true.

"At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birth place of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn."

It is impossible for us to think of Jesus on earth without thinking of Him historically. He was inevitably wrapped up in the political life of the people. He was involved in tax decrees from the time of His birth to the time of His death. He was subject to dictatorial rulers and to the mercenary whims of their clerks and secretaries. He traveled through provinces of a country under the immediate domination of Rome. Finally, He was nailed to the cross by a Roman governor who had tried, by washing his hands, to free himself of guilt in the matter.

There were no special accommodations made for travelers along the route, and Mary and Joseph either had to stay with someone or sleep in the open along the route. Because we tend to go at high rates of speed in this machine age, we tend to forget that the journey they made was of several days' duration.

# D.G. Martin Is CHOP "Neighbor Of The Year" Awards Dinner Speaker

The Charlotte Organizing Project (CHOP) will hold its first annual "Neighbor of the Year" Awards Dinner on December 14 at the Metro Center. The dinner, which begins at 7 p.m., also serves to kick off CHOP's Charter Membership Drive. Charlotte attorney D. G. Martin, former Democratic candidate in the 1984 9th Congressional district race and probable candidate in '86, is the featured speaker.

Neighbor of the Year nominees were selected by their neighborhood organizations as men and women of above-average commitment to their communities. They include:

Eleanor Washington, University Park Improvement Association; Gary Collins, Hidden Valley Association; Ella Evans, Capitol Drive Association; Tom Coffey, Verdale Community Association; Winnie Shultzberger, Autumnwood Community Association; Willie Jeeter, Wilmore Neighborhood Association; Evelyn Bullard, Washington Heights Improvement Association; Anna M. Hood, Orvis Street Community; Frank Kelly, Oakdale-Oakhills Community; James A. Yancey, University Park North Community; Bonnie Schroeder, Hearstone Neighborhood Association; Mildred Taylor, Optimist Park Community Organizations; and Barbara J. Watson, York Road Park Community.

Tickets for the dinner are \$10 apiece. This tax deductible donation also serves as full payment for one \$10 charter membership. For your tickets-membership, call CHOP at 331-0022 or stop by 2300 E. 7th Street between 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

CHOP is a non-profit, membership-based grassroots organization working to develop strong, effective community associations and issue groups in Charlotte's low and moderate income communities. CHOP helps neighborhoods get the things they need and get rid of the things they don't want by providing technical staff assistance, leader-



James A. Yancey  
.....CHOP nominee



D. G. Martin  
.....9th District candidate

ship development training, and transferring organizing skills to community leaders.

Requests from neighborhoods for CHOP's help have increased the importance of the charter membership drive. We want to develop more staff and resources capable of reaching into every low income neighborhood in Charlotte. Members will have access to all organizing skills training offered by CHOP and the opportunity to serve on fundraising and organizing advisory committees. Advisory committees will meet four times a year to assist the Board and staff in developing CHOP's program.

The Board of Directors for CHOP is made up of a diverse group of individuals representing all economic levels and a variety of occupations ranging from homemakers to attorneys, from nurses to students. The Project gives staff assistance to Optimist Park, and Washington Heights. Issue groups have also been developed around specific concerns of low income constituencies. These groups in-

clude United Neighborhoods for No Utility Increases, Mecklenburg Council of Senior Citizens, and Charlotteans for Free South Africa.

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thoughtfully prepared. The concern expressed for the well-being and for the plight of persons below the poverty level, homeless and powerless in America and other parts of the world is indeed a critical public and private concern, the resolution stated.

President James McConduit said, "We want to offer our support and volunteer our service to advance the letter to the parish level for discussion, action and implementation." Mr. McConduit said the NOBC-NBLCC will forward a letter to Bishop Malone, President of the NCCB this week offering to assist in bringing this most timely and crucial matter to the parish level in every Archdiocese-Diocese, as it affects urban and rural America.

The resolution called upon the more than one million Black Catholics to increase their participation in this era of high technology to better enable the young to share in a fuller life and to preserve the dignity of our seniors, the farmers of America and all who struggle for equality and justice in the modern world.

The resolution cited the coming "Year of the Lay Person" that the Vatican has announced as being a valuable forum for discussion on the world economies and how it affects all people. Mr. McConduit said, "The teachings of the Catholic Church on this issue and the university of the Church can become powerful spiritual agents for change."

Members of the two boards discussed a broad level of issues ranging from Lay and Youth Leadership, Education, Culture & Worship, Pastoral Ministry, Hunger, Unemployment, Teenage Pregnancy, and other matters affecting church and community.

### PARK ROAD

Park Road Baptist Church is again presenting its Christmas Tableau. First produced in 1952, it has become a living symbol for Christmas for the members and community of Park Road Baptist Church.

The 34th annual production of "Judean Hills," a Living Tableau, will be presented 20 times each evening, December 19-24, from 7-10 p.m. at the church. Seeing and hearing from your car, you will be able to enjoy the true spirit of Christmas as a host of angels appears to the shepherds and proclaims the Good news. Then the shepherds go in haste toward the star where they find the Babe lying in a manger.

All are invited to come out. Park Road Baptist Church is located at 3900 Park Road.

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