

NORTHERN LIGHT

The Official Newsletter of

The Cariboo Presbyterian Church

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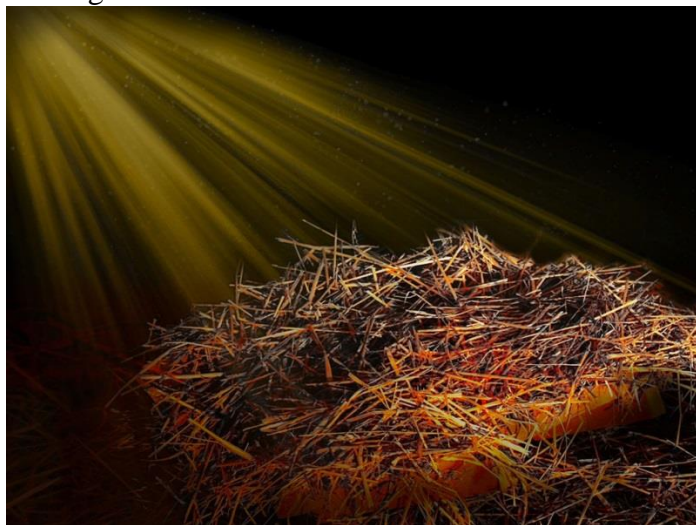
Editor: Jon Wyminga

Christmas Edition, 2017

WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN!

Looking Back . . . Looking Ahead: Jon Wyminga

As I write this we in the Cariboo House Church Ministry look back on an extremely difficult summer. Many of us will be recovering from it for quite some time. As I write this many more of us are looking ahead to celebrate the birth of Jesus and a brand new year soon after that. Almost all of this newsletter is either about that looking back and looking ahead.



The summer of 2017 was the most devastating forest fire season in BC history and it felt like we in the Cariboo were among the hardest hit. At one time or another everyone in our house church ministry was affected. People were evacuated from their homes in 108 Mile House, 100 Mile House, then parts of Lac la Hache, then Williams Lake and parts of the McLeese Lake area, then those of us in Nazko, Kluskus and Titetown and later, Sheridan Lake. Canim Lake had the dubious distinction of being evacuated twice. I may even have forgotten some other evacuations in this list. Large areas of forest were devastated along with much wildlife and, of course, so were several

homes and properties. Still I continue to be amazed at how many homes and communities were spared. We attribute that to God graciously answering the prayers of many people. The raging Plateau Fire, which became the largest in the province's history, came to within two kilometres of our community of Nazko, one kilometre of the village of Kluskus (80 km west of Nazko) and several kilometres of the cottage community of Titetown (65 km northwest of Nazko) and then stopped there for what felt like several weeks. Before that it seemed to defy every effort of the firefighters to stop it. We in the Cariboo and many of you across the country were praying in response to regular updates over the internet. Earlier the same firestorm wrapped its way around a small lake to the southwest of Nazko but virtually bypassed the small fishing resort and its lone remaining occupant at the north end of the lake. We know another couple nearby who sadly lost everything on their property but the fire stopped just short of consuming their house. Another family in one of our southern house churches was evacuated exactly a year after their home had been destroyed by fire in 2016. This time their house was completely spared, though the fire came very close indeed and they suffered significant property damage. You'll read another remarkable story of answered prayer later in this newsletter.

While we rejoice in these amazing stories we also grieve the losses that many people suffered. Why were some prayers answered and some, seemingly, were not? We may never know the answer in this life. Even people whose homes were spared returned to face costly damage and a very long recovery. Other people we know lost their retirement dream, or their home, or property or livelihood. When entire tracts of

forest are consumed what are the guide outfitters and trappers and vacation resort owners we know supposed to do? And of course we remember others around the world who suffered even greater devastation last summer: the earthquakes in Mexico, the hurricanes in the southern US and the Caribbean and the resulting devastation that Puerto Rico is still trying to recover from. While we believe God created this beautiful world we have to admit that it sure can descend into an ugly mess sometimes. It hits you right in the face when you live through a natural disaster. We might even question whether there is a God who created it after all!

As we look back on a devastating summer and as we look ahead to celebrating the coming of Jesus I see a great sign of hope for all of us. I remember that one of my theological professors at Knox College years ago said that during this season of Advent we remember not just one coming of Jesus but two. Of course we remember that Jesus came as a baby born in Bethlehem and was laid in a manger. We remember that he was the very “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) who came to “dwell among us” (John 1:14) and to share our human struggle. He even came face to face with our human tragedy when he died on the cross. But we also remember that he was raised victoriously over death, ascended to heaven and will come again to restore all things. Unfortunately many modern preachers of the second coming seem to focus on destruction – not restoration. Jesus seeks to restore people of course. That’s why we’re encouraged to receive that promise and put our trust in him. But the Scripture says he will also come to restore God’s good creation from the ugly mess it so often descends into. Listen to how the Bible puts it:

“For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”
(Colossians 1:19-20)

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”
(Romans 8:19-21)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’”
(Revelation 21:1-4)

The Gustafsen Fire: Don Lipsett

“Our” fire began on July 7. It spread rapidly on the west side of Highway 97, from just north of the town of 100 Mile House, burning homes and some businesses in the 105 Mile residential area, and threatening those in the 103 Mile subdivision. Within four hours, the wind carried it fourteen kilometres (almost nine miles) north to the very edge of 108 Mile Ranch, the large subdivision of over 700 homes and a number of businesses. All these areas were evacuated and the town of 100 Mile House was put on Evacuation Alert. Two of our sons and their families live in 108, and my wife and I helped them pack up what valuables they could, bringing them to our home on the east side of the highway in the 105 Mile area. Then we got the order to leave, and had 45 minutes to make our own decisions and drive away. Since the fire had begun, about six or seven hours had passed. Few were prepared.



In 108, the fire took two homes. The smoke and heat were intense, and the high winds bore the fire down onto the west flank of the subdivision. The first responders – fire fighters and police – were radioed to pull back for their own protection. The Royal

Canadian Mounted Police officers who had just been relieved, gathered together at the detachment headquarters in 100 Mile. There the Corporal told them he had just been advised that the situation at the subdivision (where many of their homes were) was so dangerous that 108 could not be saved: it had to be abandoned to the fire. One of the officers there was Reserve Constable Clint Lange - formerly a corporal – who had taken early retirement two years previously to answer God’s call upon his life: he is the pastor of 100 Mile’s Hillside Community Church (Pentecostal). When the fire had broken out Clint, sensing that the detachment would need all the help they could get, had put on this “other” uniform and reported to their building. None of them there had faced a crisis of this intensity and size in all their years of service. When the Corporal informed them of the decision which had to be made about 108 Mile Ranch, Clint suggested that the one thing which could be done would be to pray, and asked if he might. The Corporal, in turn, called all the officers together and said that Clint would lead them in prayer. They all gathered in a huddle, and Pastor Clint asked God for mercy, and that He would stop the fire which no one could stop. They prayed – and *that was the moment* the wind abruptly ceased, then swung 180 degrees and started blowing from the opposite direction. The flames blew back on the already burnt forest – and went out. God alone saved 108 Mile Ranch.

Bruce and Jackie’s Experience: Bruce Wilcox

What a summer! Due to forest fires, Jackie and I were evacuated for over two weeks and ended up in Prince George with my folks for most of that time. Almost all of our other communities and house-church folks throughout the Cariboo were evacuated at different times also, and ended up scattered in many different places - some in evacuee centres in Prince George, Kamloops, or Quesnel, some billeted with other families or relatives, some living out of their RVs, and some (ranchers and farmers especially) who decided to stay put to protect their places and livestock.

We have been back to normal for a while now in the house church ministry here, and have seen how these problems have really brought out the best in a lot of folks who have pulled together in helping and serving others Amazing! Sadly, some areas suffered major losses, while others escaped very lightly, for which we are thankful. None of the folks connected with our house churches here in the South Cariboo suffered the loss of their primary dwelling

place, even though some were directly in the path of the fire! Some did lose timber, fencing, and hay stocks that have been depleted for the ranchers.

In flying over our neighborhood here at the 108 Mile, helicopter pilots were reportedly saying they thought the whole area was going to be lost for sure. Two houses burned down, and one of the local pastors from 100 Mile House who was working also as a member of the RCMP on the scene was telling me that at that critical moment he gathered some other officers around him, having no idea how many were even believers, and suggested they join him in praying. Pastor Clint said after they had finished praying, and just in the nick of time, the wind miraculously and unexpectedly changed and started blowing the fire back upon itself! As a result our home and many hundreds of others here in the 108 Mile Ranch escaped certain destruction. One helicopter in another area crashed but the pilot escaped unharmed and we are also very thankful that no one was killed fighting these fires.

Here in the 100 Mile House area the Cariboo Presbyterian Church is participating with other local churches who are also trying to assist those impacted by the fires, in helping provide a summary of resources available not only from our Churches, but local & government resources. We are seeking to help as a liaison and to advocate for folks who need assistance as we are able, including small businesses who have suffered major losses as a result of the disruptions caused by the fires.

Our good God is still sovereignly working out His purposes in the lives of many people through all of this . . . especially, we pray, in the lives of people who still need Him. I was privileged to have the opportunity during our evacuation to Prince George to lead a Church service for the evacuees there at UNBC one Sunday. It helps to remember that wherever we are now, or wherever we may yet end up, in all circumstances we are still Jesus’ “sent ones”, His ambassadors through whom He is working out all of His good will!

Thank you again to all of you who support this mission so generously, and for your faithful prayers!

An Unforgettable Summer: Gordon Kellett

The summer of 2017 was one I don’t think I will ever forget. I lost my mother on July 15, in the midst of the worst wildfire season in BC history. She was 98, and while her health was failing, her mind was still quite clear. Mom was evacuated from a care facility in 100 Mile House, BC, on July 9, as a

result of the Gustafson Lake Wildfire. She was transported to The Nicola Valley Community Hospital at Merritt, BC, where she went home to be with Our Lord a week later. I was able to speak to her by phone and tell her that I loved her and it was okay for her to leave. She died peacefully at 1:15 p.m.

Her nurse told me she was certain Mom had understood me because she ceased to struggle for breath. On July 10, our area was placed on evacuation alert and 100 Mile House was evacuated and remained out for two weeks, so it was not until August 4 that I was able to have a memorial service for her in Forest Grove. It was a wonderful service with Pastor Bruce Wilcox speaking of the promise of resurrection and included two drum tributes from Chief Mike Archie and members of the Canim Lake Band, praising her kindness and generosity to the people of the band. Several speakers paid tribute to her with personal reminiscences of her impact on their lives. As one of my friends remarked, there was a lot of love in the room that afternoon.

Then on the night of August 13, lightning struck the mountain behind my house, igniting what was later classed as a Class Six Fire, which is the most dangerous rating. Friends from Forest Grove got me out to 100 Mile House where I spent the next three days in a motel. I lost the lower half of my left leg because of diabetes in 2007, so I required special accommodation.

On the Friday before Labor Day, I was evacuated a second time. The RCMP pounded on my door at 1:30 am, and said the fire had flared up and was spreading rapidly. They arranged for me to be escorted out by ambulance. I spent the remainder of the night in the emergency ward of the local hospital and the next four days in a seniors care facility.

The threat of the fires, the trauma of the evacuations and Moms passing placed me on an emotional roller coaster. For much of the summer, the smoke obscured the view of Canim Lake and made it unsafe to spend any time outside. All these weeks later I am still dealing with all of that and I know I will be for a long time to come. But I feel I got off lightly. All of our congregations were affected by the wildfires and many members lost their homes and their businesses. A number of my friends were out of their homes and communities for weeks, uncertain if there would be anything left to go home to. But, the disaster brought our communities closer together. The work of the volunteers (large numbers of them), the firefighters, paramedics, police and neighbours was phenomenal.

I believe that God had His hand in all of this and that He never left my side. I have a mixture of feelings about all this: gratefulness that no lives were lost; grief for my mother, but thankfulness that I was allowed to tell her I loved her, and that her passing was peaceful; thankfulness that my home was spared and, again, grief for those who lost theirs. The events of the summer have changed my life, and the lives of many others, and they have brought me closer to God. I feel that He has used the heartbreak and uncertainty of these disasters to help His Children trust in Him and bring them closer to Him.

As Tiny Tim said in A Christmas Carol: "God Bless us, everyone."

For Such as Time as This: Shannon Bell

It was a summer I will never forget. After arriving home from a week-long course on 'Ministry in the Midst of Trauma', we drove into Nazko to find a fire camp setting up at our school/community centre. As the newly hired administrator of the centre, I went straight to the camp to see how I could be of help. As soon as I met the Incident Commander from the Ontario-based Incident Management Team, I was hired to be the Community Liaison, a position that I expected might last up to a month. None of us could have predicted what a long summer it would turn out to be, or how much of BC would be burned by the time the snow finally fell on the fires.

I worked 10-14 hours a day for the BC



Wildfire Service in a multitude of ways. Essentially I helped the fire folks know about the community and the community to know what was happening on the fires. I made connections for local people to find work in the camp. I was able to direct teams to find homes that needed to have structural protection put on. I helped set up community meetings with all the players – fire service, RCMP, local politicians, band representatives. I created and maintained a Facebook

group and an email list to provide information to everyone affected in our area.

As the fires grew, my work shifted and changed. I was called in to help facilitate the evacuation of Nazko on August 2 and later to expand that evacuation order a couple of weeks later. After evacuation I moved into my office at the community centre and lived there for 11 days while Jon moved to Quesnel. I continued to stay in touch with many of the people who had decided not to evacuate and remained in the community. During this time the fires continued to grow and some joined together into massive fires.

On August 12 we had been breathing heavy smoke for several days and we knew that a storm was coming. By 3:00 pm the sky was black with red hues. The air was completely still – the proverbial calm



before the storm. The smoke hung like a blanket around the camp. The Incident Commander made the call and we evacuated the camp. By the time we got to our new location, the wind had picked up and we knew it would be a bad night. The hardest thing I did all summer was to drive my car up the long hill out of the Nazko valley knowing that I was

leaving behind the community I love and many people I care about, not knowing if any of it would be there when I returned at some unknown time. I wept as I thought about losing the land, the familiar places, and the faces who are my friends and neighbours. I was not able to warn any of them that we were evacuating camp. I prayed for them all and knew that all through the summer there were Christian brothers and sisters across Canada praying for the protection of our village. I drove out of the valley with a deep trust in God to care for us all.

The fire doubled in size in one night to become the largest fire in BC history. Eventually, by the time the summer finished, the Plateau Fire had grown to over 520,000 hectares, only a little smaller than Fort MacMurray the previous summer. On August 12, one family lost their home and all their belongings. Other friends lost their ranch. Still others lost everything but their house. Neighbours lost traditional family homes, cabins and animals. Hunting guides, trappers and resort owners lost their livelihoods. It was then that I began to refer to the fire

as ‘the monster’ as it mercilessly consumed everything in its path, burning even the earth and any nutrients so that it will be a long time before anything will grow

again. It was weeks before I was able to drive through the area destroyed by the fire that night and when I did, I wept again at the devastation.



I remained working as the Community Liaison for another six weeks after that night. It would be late September before things wound down enough to dismantle the camp and leave the remainder of the fire-fighting to the local forestry office. I finished in complete exhaustion and in need of healing both physically and emotionally. However, I would not have given up the opportunity to serve in this way this summer. It was an incredible experience and I was privileged to fill the role that God called me to in the midst of the stress and loss. I truly did feel called into that place in camp. God was able to take my 23 years of experience and relationships in the community and use them to facilitate smoother processes such as information sharing, community meetings, local hiring and resources, evacuation orders and the return home, and now after the fact, the presence of the Red Cross and other aid agencies. I could not have done this without being invested in this community for so long. At the same time I am grateful for the new relationships I have developed with neighbours I didn't know even existed before – people who have properties out in remote places. My relationships with some people I have known for years deepened and I grew in appreciation for them. I got to know some wonderful people this summer, both in the community and those who came to fight our fires. In my time I saw six full Incident Management Teams come and go (four from Ontario and two from BC) along with firefighters from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, NWT, the Yukon, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Mexico and Australia. I have never felt as appreciated in my life as I did this summer. I learned more about fire, structural protection and fire-fighting than I could have imagined.

Though my official work for Wildfire BC is finished, my role in the community is just beginning. I continue to try to help the community access the

resources of the Red Cross. Jon and I hope to facilitate opportunities for healing and the restoration of what was lost. We hope to influence discussions on a broader level about how firefighting is done in our area. I am organizing a Welcome Home Gathering for the community with an emphasis on sharing what we are grateful for after our terrible summer. As we ourselves heal, we will walk with our neighbours to find healing as well. In the midst of all this, we seek to point to Jesus. We share with people the power of prayer which helped protect our community. The fire stopped about two kilometres from our homes and went no further after August 12. It will be a long road of recovery but we have the love of Jesus to bring hope. I'm so thankful to have been called to Nazko 'for such a time as this.'

God With Us in the Midst: Bruce Wilcox

You have read about the hardships and losses of this summer, but on the positive side a lot of us were really encouraged and blessed by the way so many folks stepped up to help others in all kinds of ways. The hospitality as well as hours of volunteer service along with the work of many firefighters and first responders was very uplifting for a lot of folks.

Underlying even positive responses there are usually other deeper reactions going on in the minds and hearts of many when unexpected suffering and loss occurs. Questions arise like, "Why does one person or family lose everything, while others even on the same street escape unscathed?" While we are really thankful that none of the firefighters here lost their lives, we can't help but wonder why others lose theirs in other disasters. It all seems so random, so arbitrary.

When it comes to God in the midst of trauma and suffering, it seems most of us experience one or more of the following reactions: Anger (and this can include Christians) . . . "God, why did You let this happen?" Or, some think it's all Satan's doing and God has nothing whatsoever to do with it. Or fatalism, usually from atheists and agnostics: that there is no purpose, no God, it's just "fate", and ?&!# happens. These reactions in turn tend to produce various combinations of fear, confusion, anxiety, apathy, anger, hopelessness, and a sense of dread.

In addition to helping folks with the physical and financial resources they need, one of the key ways Christians can also help is to "*be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*" (II Corinthians 1:3-4). Sometimes our role in helping traumatized

people may be to simply be with them and listen to them, but ultimately the best antidote to hopelessness, and the key to the kind of unique comfort we Christians can receive from God, and then share, has to do with not only His love, but an understanding and acceptance of the beautiful Biblical truths around His sovereignty. This is a sovereignty that encompasses His foreknowledge, omniscience, goodness, control and active purposes in *all* things! Not just the good, but also the evil that He allows to exist.

Now, does that mean that God is the author of sin, or evil? Of course not! God cannot sin. Therefore, it has been rightly said that being willing to allow sin to exist in the world is not the same as sinning. In other words, God does not commit sin in being willing that sin exists.

Now we know there are mysteries around these things that we will never fully understand in this life, and understandably God's over-arching sovereignty may be hard to accept in the midst of something like a monstrous out-of-control forest fire, but the only alternative will be to think, deep down, that God's power and control (even His love?) is somehow only partial, or conditional . . . only really believable in the good times, when we are feeling sufficiently "blessed." The popularity of prosperity gospel preaching these days only compounds this problem.

We know that suffering can come in the form of natural disasters, or the morally sinful choices made by human beings. But whether a forest fire is started by lightning or by an arsonist, (and we had both), the great Biblical truth is that God is still in total control, including to whatever extent the enemy may or may not be allowed to be involved.

In the Scripture we see Job's sufferings coming in the form of the sinful decisions of a band of Sabeans who murdered and plundered, as well as in the form of lightning, then a tornado which took the lives of his family. And even in the midst of this extreme suffering, and after the loss of his own health, Job somehow held on to the sovereignty of God (not the "sovereignty" of Satan) when he said to his wife, "*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*" (Job 2:10). And, "*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.*" (Job 1:21).

Many hundreds of years later we see the Scripture verifying that the only purposes being worked out in Job's life were *God's* purposes, and that they were good ones, as hard as that may be for us to fathom (James 5:11). Likewise, we see the apostle

Paul's thorn in the flesh described as a "messenger of Satan", but then Paul coming to realize it was for his own good (the opposite of Satan's intentions), when God did not remove it, because it was "to keep me from exalting myself." (II Corinthians 12:7).

So we know God controls the weather, because "even the wind and the sea obey Him", and we know He is also in control of the enemy, who needs His permission. And all of this combined with His omnipresence and omniscient foreknowledge also means that yes, God is even able to sovereignly work out His active purposes right smack dab in the midst of the morally sinful decisions of people, individually and/or collectively!

What Joseph's brothers meant for evil, God at that very same time "*meant it for good . . . to save many people alive.*" (Genesis 50:20). In Acts 4:24, when the early Church came together to pray, they began with "*Sovereign Lord*". . . then they went on to say, "*Indeed Herod, and Pontius Pilate met together with the gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your Holy Servant Jesus . . .*" (v. 27). Then notice verse 28! - "*They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*"

This is how we, like the early Church, can also be absolutely assured of His promise to those who trust Him that "*He is able to work all things together for our good.*" (Romans 8:28). Because of His unchanging sovereignty and love, we can also be assured of the final guaranteed result of all of this, as promised in verses 29-30 immediately following. "*For those God fore-knew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son And those He predestined He also called; those He called He also justified; those He justified He also glorified.*"

But still, the eternal question inevitably arises:

"Why does a good God allow such evil and suffering to exist?" Maybe the best answer is contained in something the great theologian Jonathan Edwards said well over two hundred years ago: "If God did not permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in His providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from So evil is necessary . . . because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of His Love. And if the knowing of Him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionally imperfect."

This is more than just abstract theologizing when we consider that God Himself was willing to enter into the worst kind of suffering and loss that could ever be experienced by a human being, by "becoming sin for us" so that we could know Him and His love and grace in a way that we simply otherwise never could! And because He did this for us we can also know that He somehow knows and feels our pain, because when we groan, He groans with us! (Romans 8:26).

So, understanding the love of God in the context of His total sovereignty should be of much additional comfort to us in facing any kind of adversity or disaster, now or yet to come. Praying for God's help in convicting and making our minds up about this will be indispensable in not only being unshakeable in Christ, but to even being able to "*give Him thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*" (I Thessalonians, Emphasis mine).

The peace and comfort of Christ be with you all this Christmas season and always, and many thanks for your ongoing prayers and support!

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION, HOUSE CHURCH REPORTS

The First Christmas: Cowboy Style

By Baxter Black (as found on Facebook)

Now, I 'spect most of you cowboys have heard the story 'bout Christmas. How it came to be an' all, but I wanna 'splain it so's y'all kin understand.

It all started with this cowboy named Joe. He's married him a girl named Maria. . . .

Times was hard in them days. They's down to the crumbly jerky and one ol' paint gelding named Duke. To top it off, Maria was in the family way!

They'd been ridin' several days, with Joe mostly walkin'.

They camped on the trail and Maria was gettin' tired and ornery. Late one night, December 24th, I think, they spotted the lights of a little burg. It was a welcome sight, 'cause the weather'd turned coolish.

There was only one hotel in town and Joe offered to chop wood or wash dishes for a room, but they were full up. The clerk said they could lay out their rolls in the livery stable. Git 'em out of the wind, anyway. So Joe built 'em a nest in one of the

stalls and went out to rustle up some grub. When he came back, Maria was fixin' to have that baby! Well, Joe panicked! He laid out his slicker, fluffed up the straw and ran down the street lookin' for a doc.

By the time he got back, Maria'd done had the baby! It was a boy. She had him wiped off an' wrapped up in Joe's extra long john shirt. Joe was proud and Maria was already talkin' baby talk to the little one. They discussed what to call him. Joe wouldn't have minded if they'd named him Joe Jr. but Maria wanted to call him Jesus. A promise she'd made before Joe knew her.

Maria was tuckered. Jesus was sleepin' like a baby and Joe was tickin' like a two dollar watch! Fatherhood had hit him like a bag of loose salt. Just then he heard singin'.

In through the door of the livery come six Mexican shepherders. They gathered around the baby and said he sure looked good. "Niño especial," they said. Then they laid out some tortillas and commenced to visit.

Suddenly three fellas rode right into the livery. There was two Indian braves and a black cavalry scout. They told Joe that they'd had a vision and followed a star right to this very spot. Joe said, "No kiddin'?" "Shore nuf," they said. This was good news to Joe.

Not only that, they'd brought three buffalo hides, two handmade blankets and a little poke of gold dust which they gave to Joe, to use for the baby. Joe and Maria were overwhelmed. One of the herders tied together a little crib. He packed the bottom with straw and laid a sheepskin over it. Maria laid Baby Jesus in it and He never woke up; just gurgled and smiled.

Then the whole bunch of 'em stayed up all night talkin' 'bout Christmas. Joe never forgot. He did his best to raise his son right and when Jesus went on to bigger and better things, Joe'd remember that night. When a handful of strangers helped his little family through a hard time.



He told Jesus 'bout it when He was old enough to understand. How just a little kindness to yer fellow man can go a long way. Jesus took it to heart.

The Desert Way to the Manger: Mark Carter

"And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" Isaiah 60:3

The Fisher-Price Doll Jesus

What do you think of when you hear "the three kings"? Is it Bing Crosby's voice crooning out the lyrics to "We Three Kings"? Maybe it is a picture of three ten year old boys with painted on beards marching across a stage towards a manger scene where sheep, donkeys, and shepherds are shuffling around and waving at various members of the audience. The story of the Nativity has been ingrained into the essence of Christmas in Western culture and so these events recorded in scripture take on a feeling of Christmas, rather than portray the force of prophecy. Let's consider how the writer of one of the best known narrations of these events could have seen the "three kings".

The True Shepherd is Coming

The gospel of Matthew is like the paint-by-number of gospels when it comes to scripture fulfillment. Matthew makes it very clear when he believes an important scripture fits into the narrative by saying something like "for so it is written", to indicate where the event fits into Israel's scriptures. In the case of the wise men, he says, "behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem" (Matthew 2:1). Matthew seems concerned here to show that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in order to fulfill a prophecy from the prophet Micah, who said "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." (Micah 5:2). But that is not all that is going on here. He points to a specific prophecy, using the wise men, but the very fact that they are wise men, or kings, from the east is itself an indication pregnant with meaning. This is where the prophet Isaiah has something to say.

Isaiah Knew It All Along

One thing to know about the book of Isaiah is that there is a sense of progression in his writing. The first section contains warnings against other nations for their wickedness and also warnings for Israel for its wickedness. He then moves on to a warning of coming judgement on Israel because they were not listening to God's warning. Then, he skips ahead in a

sense and begins speaking to Israel in kind terms and writes as if they have gone through a terrible ordeal. He speaks of an exile to Babylon, even though it had not happened in his day. Finally, Isaiah begins speaking of a restoration in Israel, that they would be freed from exile and return to a wonderful new place, where there would be blessing and the nations of the earth would come to Israel and bow down before them (Isaiah 60:14).

The Three “News” Men

Is this starting to sound familiar to Matthew’s story? In fact, Isaiah prophesied that kings would come to Israel, bringing gold and incense and would bring “good news”. We know about the gold and incense, but what was the “good news” they brought. According to Matthew 2:2, the wise men said “where is he who is born king of the Jews?” and in verse 6 the



wise men quoted Micah saying “. . . from you shall come a ruler *who will shepherd my people Israel.*” The good news they bring is that the king had arrived in Israel who would shepherd the people! The people had been without a king for centuries and their kings had always failed to some extent. They had been waiting expectantly for the righteous king who would fulfill the prophecy to David by the prophet Nathaniel, who said “I [God] will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12b-13 ESV) The kings brought the “good news” to Israel that the heir to David’s throne, who would establish his kingdom forever, had come in a manger. But that is not all that Isaiah was saying in Isaiah 60:3.

All Will Be Drawn to Him

The context of Isaiah’s prophecy was the glorious return of Israel from exile in Babylon and the foreigners and gentile nations would come to Israel because they desired to know God and be among his covenant people. It was a prophecy of universal

magnetism of people who were not of Israel being drawn to God. Isaiah puts it poetically by saying “Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall hope for me . . .” (Isaiah 60:8-9a).

The Veiled Surprise

So let’s consider the three kings coming for the birth of Christ to Israel from the east with Isaiah’s prophecy in mind. It seems clear that the three kings signified the nations of the world coming to Israel because God had come to set up his glorious kingdom. The nations were drawn to God on earth incarnate in Jesus. Thinly veiled in this birth narrative is the promise and fulfillment of God’s blessing to all people and not just to the Jews. These three kings were the ambassadors of the world, coming to worship Christ, the true King, showing that salvation was not just for the Jews, but for the whole world.

The “Kings” Promise

This is a promise that I hang onto very dearly. Christ the true king has come into the world and I benefit from it as someone who is from the “nations” that has been drawn to that light, who is Jesus. What a marvelous promise to think about as we enter into the Christmas season.

Punchaw House Church: Anne Migvar

Punchaw house church is really a family affair. It only grows in numbers when one of the grandchildren, who are adults now, gets married. But every once in a while everything clicks, like church night on October 30. There were eleven of us gathered together to worship God and his son Jesus, study his Word, sing praises to him and also to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. We pray for our neighbours who have some medical problems, that their ranch work goes safely and smoothly and their hearts will be opened to God. Sometimes it’s just Jon and me at church due to ranch chores and/or the weather so we study the Word over a cup of tea. I give thanks to God for a minister who travels so far to teach us.

A New Birth Certificate for Christmas:

Bruce Wilcox

When Jesus was still a baby, He was worshiped as a King by wise men. A King means a kingdom, so no wonder Jesus called His gospel the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. So the great question becomes, “How can any human being know this King

and become a registered citizen in His glorious and eternal Kingdom?”

The faith by which these Magi from a different country traveled such a long distance to worship this new King signified that they, like Abraham and others before them, must have also actually been seeking “a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:16)

This city is described in the very next Chapter as “Mt Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. . .” (Hebrews 12:22). The amazing thing about this is that even though the fullness of our experience of it is yet ahead of us, we have already become citizens of this royal city, this New Jerusalem, in Christ. The beginning of verse 22 speaks in the present tense when it says to believers “But *you have come* to Mt. Zion. . .” This includes our names “registered in heaven. . .” (v.23), along with everything else described in verses 22-24. Full

citizenship now! This also represents the fulfilling of some amazing and prophetic things written in the 87th Psalm, which speaks of this same “Zion” and “City of God” (v. 2-3), and tells us in verse 4 that people from the Gentile nations will also be “*born in Zion.*” Verse 6 again emphasizes “*The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born in Zion.’*”

This is why Jesus our Savior and King came that first Christmas, so that anyone anywhere in the world through repentance and faith could know Him, and be born again (literally translated “born from above” (John 3:3). Which also means a new spiritual birth certificate and passport right now that says “**This is (insert name here), BORN IN ZION.**” All because of Christmas, and the best Christmas gift anyone still in need of it could possibly receive! Let us be prayerfully ready to share this good news at every opportunity the Lord gives us.

A blessed and merry Christmas to you all!

SOME FINAL COMMENTS

The Privilege of Helping: Jon Wyminga

As devastating as the wildfires have been, they have resulted for us in the privilege of distributing support for several people who have faced great losses and damage. Presbyterian World Service and Development received a significant amount of money for relief and has asked The Cariboo House Church Ministry and our oversight body, the presbytery, to oversee its distribution. One church in the lower mainland of BC chose to provide support more directly and gave a sizeable cheque for one family in the southern part of the Cariboo. A woman who had been recently widowed donated her late husband’s extensive collection of tools to one couple who face a great deal of damage to their property, including the loss of many tools. We have been in touch with organizations like Samaritan’s Purse and Mennonite Disaster Relief who are also seeking to provide recovery support. Shannon Bell and others have been networking with the Red Cross to provide long term recovery assistance for people with significant losses. It has been a privilege to witness the generosity of so many people from across the country and to help connect this generous support to the people who need it. Thank you so much to everyone who has been stepping up to provide help and assistance.

Thanks for Your Support: Jon Wyminga

In addition to everything else this summer’s wildfires has had a serious impact on our ability to communicate with our supporters. Last year we decided to move from three to two newsletters a year in order to invest more time and money in serving our communities in the name of Jesus. Our intention was to replace the spring newsletter with a simple letter in July to thank our supporters and bring them up-to-date. Unfortunately the wildfires and evacuations meant that the letter was never written and there was a dearth in our communication. The result has been that our financial support has dropped considerably from this time last year. Obviously we will be reconsidering the decision about our newsletter but we will also be depending on you, our supporters, in a special way this Christmas season. If you wish to send some financial support by mail please use our Lac la Hache address at the beginning of this newsletter rather than the Nazko address on the envelope. That will ensure your contribution gets to the bank more expediently. Support for forest fire victims has and will, of course, be gratefully received and faithfully distributed but we also depend on support to cover our ongoing expenses. God has been faithful to us in this ministry since we began in 1989 and so have our supporters. Thank you for your ongoing help. God bless you and Merry Christmas!