

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God

Featured **Articles**

Remembrance (p. 3)

Mary the Mother of Jesus (p. 10)

The Spiritual Body (p. 13)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Remembrance

THE 19TH CENTURY was a time of advancing knowledge and a thirst for learning. In 1857 the market town of Llanelli in South Wales opened the 'Athenaeum'. The name refers to the ancient temple of Athena in Athens where Greek scholars would meet to discuss and learn. The Llanelli Athenaeum was a literary and scientific institution for the benefit and education of the public. True to its original purpose, the building is now the public library. Throughout the years it has hosted various cultural and educational events—including a number of high-profile debates between members of the orthodox church and Christadelphians.

One of these took place over two evenings in December 1894, when 200 people crowded into the Athenaeum to hear an examination of the subjects "Is the Soul Immortal?" and "Is the Soul Conscious between Death and the Resurrection?" Those were days when many people knew their Bibles, and were keenly interested in the great questions of religion.

One of the Bible passages that will have been discussed is Ecclesiastes 9:5-6: *'The living know that they will die, but the dead*

know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and for ever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.'

Contrary to the popular belief, the Bible does not teach that consciousness carries on after death. We cease to exist. But that does not mean that death must be the end—because God does not forget. *'This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day'* (John 6:40). Those are words of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, and when he returns to earth to establish God's Kingdom he will give eternal life to those who have believed and been faithful to him.

How God Remembers

Memory is a strange thing. How often do we forget things we want to remember, and remember things we want to forget?

God is not like that. *'I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,*

saying, *'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'* (Isaiah 46:9–10). If we belong to God we can have absolute confidence: *'The Lord knows those who are his'* (2 Timothy 2:19). He knows every detail of our lives: *'Even the hairs of your head are all numbered'* (Matthew 10:30).

God never forgets—except when He wants to forget something. Then He erases it: *'I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins'* (Isaiah 43:25). Think about that! No matter what you've done, no matter how you feel about it, no matter what other people say—if you turn back to God and ask His forgiveness, then He will forgive you. And then as far as He is concerned it's gone and there's no need to worry about it any more.

The prophet Micah pleaded with his people to turn back to God from their evil ways with words of reassurance: *'He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea'* (Micah 7:19).



To belong to God is to be confident in His absolute knowledge of everything we are

and everything we do, and in the certainty of His mercy and forgiveness.

How We Remember

We are not like God. We forget, very easily. For this reason the Lord Jesus gave his followers a simple practice to keep them focused on the things that are really important in life. On the night before he died, he shared a meal with his disciples. *'And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, *"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"* (Luke 22:19–20). Ever since, his followers have expressed their faith and fellowship, reminded themselves of the forgiveness of their sins, and rededicated their lives to his service, by sharing this simple ritual together.

The ancient Greeks who met and debated in the Temple of Athena have largely been forgotten, along with their wisdom. However, those people of ancient and modern times who have believed in the God of the Bible and look forward to His Kingdom, will not be forgotten:

'Those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession" (Malachi 3:16–17).

Simple Rituals

IN THE GARDEN of Eden, Eve plucked and ate a piece of fruit (Genesis 3:6). It was a small and simple act, but it brought untold disaster. It was not simply the act of picking fruit—it was a premeditated act of rebellion against God, and it brought upon humanity the curse under which we have lived ever since. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they caused a rift between themselves and God and they became dying creatures.

Baptism

And people have been heard to ask, “What difference can being dipped in water make to anybody?” That is all baptism is: a dip under the water. The answer is that its whole significance is in the mind of the one who undergoes this small and simple act. It is a premeditated act of obedience to God. By it the individual becomes a member of God’s family, and embarks on the way to eternal life.

The Apostle Paul explains:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought

to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:3–8).



Baptism is an act by which we die. We declare that we deserve to die because we are a child of Adam, but we want to live as a child of God. So we do what Jesus Christ showed us, when he laid down his mortal life and was raised by God to be given immortality. As we are dipped under the water, we show that we want to put to death our old self, and take on a new life.

We come out of the water the same person, with the same nature and the same brain and the same faults and weaknesses, but we have now commenced a new life. God is now our Father, for the act seen on earth has also been seen in heaven.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him

up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:31–35).

Baptism is an act of total commitment or it is nothing. It is an act neither of heroism nor of humiliation, but of repentance and gratitude, of submission and confident expectation. Thereafter no release is possible. We have entered the hugely privileged relationship to Christ of a brother or sister, an heir of what God Himself has promised.

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26–28).

Bread and Wine

When we belong to Christ, we are entitled to sit at his table. We share in the feast that he prepared (Luke 22:14–20). We share with our brothers and sisters a loaf of bread, which speaks of his body given in sacrifice—and also of the body of believers, of which he is the head and we are all together members, knit together in love (Ephesians 4:15–16). And we share a cup of wine, which speaks of his blood poured out in sacrifice—and also of the covenant by which we have received forgiveness of our sins (Hebrews 9:11–22).

The new life, which begins with the simple act of baptism and is reaffirmed by the simple ritual of bread and wine, may seem completely unremarkable to the onlooker. But to the believer it is full of wonder.



See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1–2).

Denis Jackson

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James

AFTER JESUS, Mary had other sons, including James—the writer of this letter. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to his followers, who by then included his own brothers (Acts 1:14). James later became the “shepherd” of the flock of believers in the Jerusalem area (Acts 15:13).

The Letter of James was addressed to Jewish believers further afield—those dispersed throughout the Roman world. It was written to provide help and encouragement in the face of persecution and oppression (1:12; 5:7), but it also teaches the need to put our faith into practice. It is applicable to believers everywhere, in all ages.

Faith or Works?

From the First Century AD onwards, there has been debate about which is more important—faith or works. In this letter we learn that faith (beliefs) should result in works (deeds); while works give evidence of faith. Both matter! James gives examples of people who showed both faith and works:

- Abraham (2:21–3)—believed and obeyed God.
- Rahab (2:25)—showed her belief by helping God’s messengers.
- Job (5:11)—suffered patiently.
- Elijah (5:17)—believed, so prayed earnestly.

There is sound practical advice about the curbing of the tongue (chapter 3), on the need for humility (chapter 4), on the importance of prayer (chapter 5), and on the importance of putting faith into practice:



Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (James 1:22–25).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ James 1:17—see Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6.
- ◆ James 2:5—see Matthew 5:3, 5; Revelation 21:7.
- ◆ James 5:7, 8—see Hebrews 10:36; 1 Peter 1:7.

God Who Saves

A VIDEO CLIP went viral on social media, apparently showing disillusioned Hindus throwing their gods away. It was claimed that this was because they had been praying to the gods to save them from COVID 19, and it had not worked. This claim has since been refuted, but the story raises interesting issues.

A Powerless Goddess

In the 1st Century AD, the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor had a temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana. A lot of the city's prosperity came from making religious artefacts for the worship of Diana, who was also known by the Greek name Artemis. Acts 19 relates how the Apostle Paul persuaded many citizens that there was only one God, the God of Christianity. These converts, both Greek and Roman, realised that Diana was just an idol and burned their religious books in public. This caused a riot led by Demetrius the silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana for a living. The people of Ephesus were not just disillusioned with their old faith: they had found a far superior and persuasive faith. This faith was based on Paul's clear message about the reality of the coming Kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).



People change their religion. The Ephesian Christians changed their faith from a Roman goddess to the God of the Bible, because of a rational conviction. But is it reasonable to lose faith in a god who fails to grant requests—for example, to save people from COVID 19? The simple answer is a clear 'no'. There is all the difference

between being unable to save (like Diana of the Ephesians) and being able but not always willing to save (like the God of the Bible).

God Can Save

There are many examples in the Bible. Before the worldwide flood, Noah preached to the people, warning them of God's imminent judgement. They did not respond, so they were destroyed in the flood. But Noah, who did believe, was saved by God (Genesis 6).

[God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly (2 Peter 2:5).

So God can and does save people from certain disasters. In contrast, in the New Testament several Christians were martyred for their faith. A notable example

is Stephen (Acts 7). God did not save him from the wrath of the Jews, even though his only crime was to preach the Gospel. In fact, Jesus had told his followers that this sort of thing would happen: *'You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death'* (Luke 21:16).

The correct attitude was shown hundreds of years earlier by Daniel's three friends in Babylon. They had refused to bow down to an image made by the king. As punishment they were told that they would be thrown into a furnace. The king said, *'Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?'* (Daniel 3:15). And their response was: *'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up'* (vs. 17–18).



*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
in the furnace*

So these men acknowledged that God had the power to save them, but that it was up to Him whether or not He did. They would still obey Him.

True Salvation

God is all powerful and has ultimate authority. We can have complete trust in Him, but that trust needs to acknowledge that He will do what is right. If our faith depends on Him doing what we want, then we have in effect invented a god.

God does promise to save, and to protect. Jesus told his disciples that every hair of their head was numbered (Matthew 10:30), and on another occasion that *'not a hair of your head will perish'* (Luke 21:18).

But this promise is in the same passage as the warning that some of them would be killed (v. 16). How can this be?

We need to remember that God is primarily concerned with eternal things. Everlasting life, not just this life. Jesus' true followers might be killed and so lose everything in this life. But ultimately not one small part of them will be lost: nothing permanently destroyed. God offers ultimate, everlasting salvation.

So we cannot assume that God will protect us in this life. Indeed, He uses some of the disasters which come upon us to further His plan and purpose. Trusting in His authority and purpose, we need to try to focus on the eternal, to *'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'* (Matthew 6:33) and to obey Him now. There is clear evidence in the Bible of His power to save. He can spare us in this life, but ultimately He wants to give us everlasting life (John 3:16). This is the salvation He offers: this is how He saves.

Anna Hart

Mary the Mother of Jesus



Nazareth

IN THE FIRST Century AD the Roman empire was peaceful and prosperous under the iron fist of the Legions. But that prosperity was paid for by heavy taxes on its subject nations. Life was difficult in Galilee, a small province to the north of Judea on the Mediterranean coast. Archaeology shows evidence of severe poverty and malnutrition among the population at the time.

There was an unremarkable village called Nazareth in the southern hills. Its residents would have scratched out a living by farming. There was a carpenter, whose name was Joseph. (The Bible calls him a carpenter (Matthew 13:55), he was probably the village jobbing builder.) He was pledged to be married to Mary, a local girl.

From what we know of the custom of the time, it's likely that Mary was a teenager. We know very little about her, but we do know her ancestry. The Jews were meticulous about recording family trees. Matthew's Gospel gives Joseph's ancestry (Matthew 1:1–16)—he was descended directly through the royal line from David, the great King of Israel who ruled at the nation's zenith one thousand years previously. Luke's Gospel details Mary's ancestry (Luke 3:23–38)—she was also descended from David, through a younger son. The kings of Israel were long since finished, but it's interesting to observe that if there had still been a throne in Jerusalem, a son of Joseph and Mary would have had an impeccable claim to it.

The other thing we know about Mary is that she was a beautiful person. I don't mean her appearance, that's not important (Proverbs 31:30)—I mean that as we see the account of her unfold in the Gospels, we see a character of enormous faith, strength and humility.

Visit of An Angel

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and

tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:26–33).

It was every Jewish woman's prayer to be the mother of the Messiah. According to the prophet the time was now right for the Messiah to appear (Daniel 9:24–27). The First Century historian Josephus records that Jews at the time were in high expectation, and so does the Bible (Luke 2:38). What would go through Mary's mind as the angel delivered his message?



Fear, probably, and maybe panic. In the highly religious environment of a First Century Jewish village, to be unmarried and pregnant would have been catastrophically shameful. She could have been stoned to

death (Deuteronomy 22:20–21). But she immediately accepted God's will.

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

We have seen that Mary's genealogical credentials were right to be the mother of the Messiah, but that was not all that mattered. God would be very careful about the person to whom He would entrust His son. Here, from her first recorded words, we see a glimpse of why He chose Mary.

Shame and Encouragement

Life became very complicated. The opportunity came for Mary to leave Nazareth—it's wonderful the way God works. Mary's aged cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant through a miracle (Luke 1:5–25), and Mary went to see her. She would be able to tell Elizabeth and her husband everything, they would understand and believe her without question, and she spent three joyous months with them (Luke 1:39–56). Then bolstered in her faith and courage, she returned to Nazareth. By this time her pregnancy would be starting to show. Joseph was of course devastated. But an angel reassured him, and to his great credit he believed and married Mary—knowing the shame that this would bring on him (Matthew 1:18–25).

We're not told what Mary went through. Throughout his life, Jesus lived with the stigma of dark gossip about his legitimacy (for example John 8:41). Mary must have been the target of immense hostility, but God gave her the encouragement of a devoted and unquestioning husband. This

is the way God works—in His wisdom He may give grievous trials to His children, but He will never leave them without comfort (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Jesus' Childhood

The story of Christ's birth is well known. He was born in a stable in Bethlehem, and laid in a manger. Shepherds came to see him (Luke 2:15–20), and some time later an exotic party of dignitaries arrived after an epic journey from the east, and gave the child gifts and worshipped him (Matthew 2:1–11). *'Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart'* (Luke 2:19). That's the kind of person she was. She was caught in the middle of the greatest event of all time, the gift to the world of the Son of God. She savoured the moment, and pondered what God was doing. There's time enough for us all to do this in our lives!

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:33–34).

In obedience to the Law of Moses (Genesis 17:10–13), Joseph and Mary took the baby to the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised (Luke 2:22–38). There was an old prophet, Simeon, whom God had told that he would see the Messiah before he died. Somehow he knew them when they arrived, he swept the baby out of their arms and erupted into a song of praise to God:

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for

my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:29–32).



Then he said to Mary, *"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed"* (vs. 34–35).

This was a prophecy. Jesus by his teaching, his example and his sacrifice for our sins will break down our self-confidence and self-opinion, so that he can build in us a new life which will glorify God (Ephesians 4:22–24); he will be opposed by the forces of darkness in the world that don't want him (John 16:33), and he will judge them (John 3:18–21). And for Mary, a special warning that to be the mother of the Son of God would bring for her a unique pain. This came all too true.

Jesus' Ministry

Joseph and Mary went on to be blessed with a large family (Matthew 13:55–56). They were a godly couple who took their

responsibility seriously, but what kind of a household would it be in which the eldest boy was the Son of God? We don't know how he interacted with his Father in heaven, but we see a hint in Isaiah 50:4–5.

When Jesus left the family home and business and started his life as a travelling preacher at the age of 30, Joseph is not mentioned—perhaps he had died by this time. Jesus quickly attracted a band of disciples who accompanied him, and initially Mary and others of the family were among them (John 2:1–12). But it wasn't long before Jesus' revolutionary teachings created friction and disillusionment among many of his disciples (John 6:66). And his own brothers doubted him (John 7:2–5).

He was consumed with his hectic work of preaching, and it seems his family became worried, or perhaps embarrassed, and one time they came demanding to see him. The sword which Simeon foretold was twisting in Mary's soul.

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46–50).

At the beginning of Luke chapter 8 there is a list of women who accompanied Jesus and his disciples and provided for them. Mary is not among them.

It is a mother's instinct to protect and nurture her son, but Mary was acutely

aware that Jesus' life had a momentum and a direction which was out of her control. We're not told where she was during the largest part of his ministry as he travelled the land preaching, or when he made his final journey into Jerusalem a week before Passover; when he berated the scribes and Pharisees in the temple, and so infuriated them that they agreed he had to be destroyed; when he was betrayed, tried and condemned by the amassed corruption of Jews and Romans. But she was there at the foot of the cross, and the wound in her soul would ache the more for his final act of kindness:

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (John 19:25–27).





The Risen Lord

Of course that was not the end of the story. The momentum and direction of Jesus' life were always under his control: *'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again' (John 10:17)*. He died to save his people from their sins, and on the third day he rose back to life.

We are given details of a number of appearances of the resurrected Jesus to various friends and disciples. We're told nothing about his meeting with his mother—how gently the sword was withdrawn from her soul, and how joyfully its wound was healed at last.

We only see her once more, at the beginning of the book of Acts, which is the account of the spread of the Gospel after Jesus' ascension to heaven. The tensions and doubts and pain over, Mary and her family were with the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, preparing for the great work of preaching to the world (Acts 1:14). Through Acts and the letters of the New Testament we're given much detail about the activities and discussions of the apostles and the various churches. We see how at least two of Jesus' brothers (James and Jude) turned from doubters

into ardent preachers. We're told nothing more about Mary.

It's such a shame that some people have elevated this lovely woman into some kind of goddess. Why have they done it? I suppose that if you believe Jesus is God, then it's difficult to believe that his mother was just a human. But she was—just a human, like you and me.

Sometimes the life of faith requires difficult things of us. When this happens, may we have the grace and courage to follow the example of Mary: *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"* (Luke 1:38).

Katie Cabeira

Questions? Comments?

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The Spiritual Body

DO NOT BE PUT OFF by this subject. You may think it unpractical or speculative. It is neither. It concerns the future that God has offered to you and me. It's a subject on which the Bible speaks plainly.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:41–44).



So says the Apostle Paul when he is explaining about the '*resurrection of the dead*', which is to happen at the return of Jesus Christ to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. He continues:

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven (vs. 45–47).

Adam and Christ

We are all children of Adam, the first man. He was created very good, but he fell from grace and became a sinful dying creature (Genesis 3). We know all too well what it is to be children of Adam—weak, unclean and dying. But God has extended to us the opportunity to exchange our inheritance of death through Adam for another inheritance—life through Jesus Christ, whom Paul refers to as '*the last Adam*' and '*the second man*'.

As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven (vs. 48–49).

When Jesus returns there will be a resurrection of many dead people, and a judgement (of those who have been raised

and also of many who are still living at the time). *'And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (Daniel 12:2)*. Those who find grace at the judgement will be changed. Jesus says they will be given a nature like angels (Matthew 22:30). Paul expresses it thus:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

The nature that will be given to those whom Christ welcomes as his friends when he returns is something beyond our comprehension, but see how Paul describes it in the few verses we've looked at: imperishable; glorious; powerful.

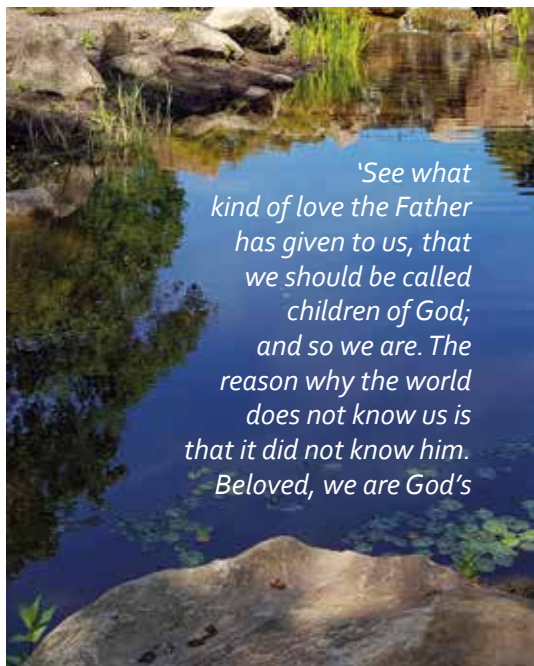
This is how the Old Testament prophet Isaiah describes it: *'He will swallow up death for ever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken' (Isaiah 25:8)*.

Physical Bodies

We have seen that we are not talking of a ghost or a shadow, something immaterial or invisible. We are talking of people with real tangible bodies. The Apostle John tells

us that when Christ returns, *'we shall be like him' (1 John 3:2)*. Paul explains that he *'will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Philippians 3:21)*. The simple and glorious truth is that those who are accepted at the judgement will be made like Christ himself.

We are told plainly what this means. The body that was crucified at Calvary was the body that was put in Joseph's tomb (Matthew 27:57–60), and that came out alive on the morning of the third day (Matthew 28:1–10). When Jesus appeared alive to his disciples, it was unmistakably as an actual physical man: *'And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have*



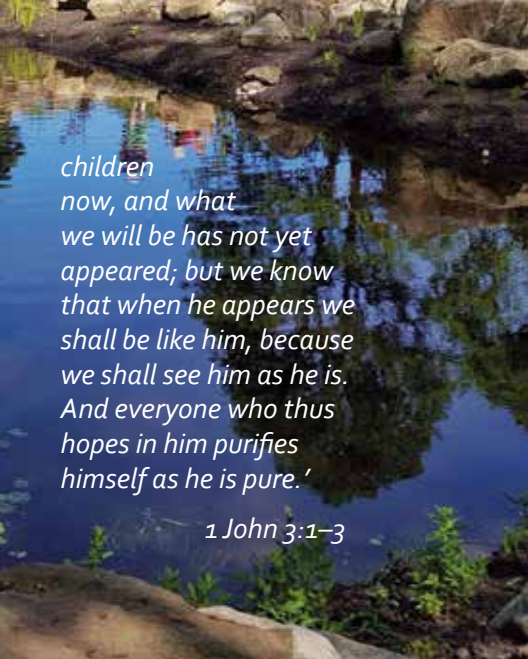
'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's

flesh and bones as you see that I have”
(Luke 24:38–39).

Here was Jesus, after his resurrection, possessing flesh and bones. After 40 days he visibly left the earth in the presence of his disciples, and they were told by two angels, “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11).

So Jesus is a real physical person possessing flesh and bones—he was when he emerged from the tomb, he will be when he returns, and he is now.

Several years after his departure to heaven, Jesus appeared to Paul as a brilliant light from heaven (Acts 9:1–5). This glory was



*children
now, and what
we will be has not yet
appeared; but we know
that when he appears we
shall be like him, because
we shall see him as he is.
And everyone who thus
hopes in him purifies
himself as he is pure.’*

1 John 3:1–3

glimpsed earlier by the disciples Peter, James and John during his ministry at the Transfiguration, when ‘*his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light*’ (Matthew 17:2). He is a living illustration of what a spiritual body is—a body which has been transformed so that it is charged with the spiritual life-power of God, glorious, powerful, perfect. A body which is as tangible as the bodies which you and I possess now, but incorruptible.

The Glorious Gospel

Is it not a glorious Gospel that gives us such a prospect? Think on it. You will find that the destiny which the Bible offers is more wonderful than anything we could dream of. It is not the migration of a disembodied immortal soul, or reincarnation to another life of pain and trouble, but the commencement of a glorious eternal physical life when the world is restored to paradise. Of this destiny that awaits the faithful, the most blessed moments of our present life are but a pale taste.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54–57).

Bible Finger Post

VM

Should Christians fast?

Ed

FASTING—voluntarily going without food—appears to have been an intrinsic part of worship in Old Testament times.

When people prayed to God in times of trouble they would often fast, for example Judges 20:26, 2 Samuel 12:16–23, Esther 4:16. People fasted when they mourned for the dead, for example 1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Samuel 1:12. Fasting accompanied repentance, for example 1 Kings 21:27, Ezra 9:5, Jonah 3:5.

What's the point of fasting? It is a way of showing God that you are upset and in need. It makes you uncomfortable. It reminds you that you are weak and that you rely on God. If you have something to pray about, it's easy to forget about it in your busy life—but if your prayer is accompanied by fasting, you don't forget about it, the hunger keeps your prayer at the front of your mind.

Fasting can be done properly, as an acceptable act of devotion to God, and it can also be done improperly, just for show. In Isaiah 58 God berates His people for making a show of fasting, without really meaning it. If it is done with the wrong attitude, fasting is no use.

There's less mention of fasting in the New Testament, but we know that people did fast. Jesus gave instructions on the right and wrong attitude to fasting: *'When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you'* (Matthew 6:16–18). In Acts 13:2–3 and 14:23 we see that fasting was part of the worship of the early church.

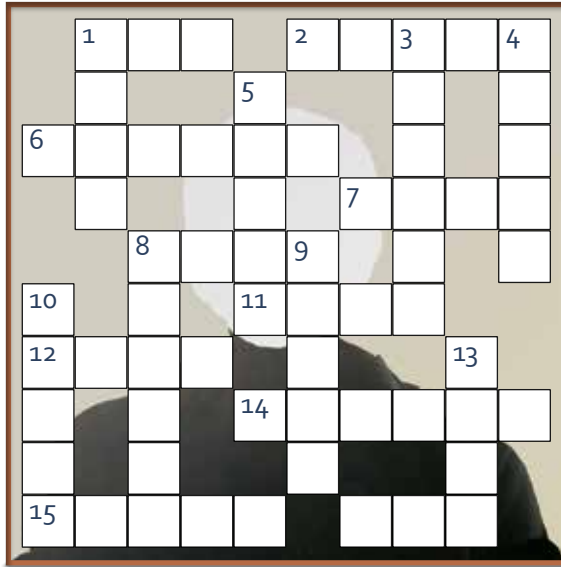
Fasting is something that can be done by individuals, as part of their personal worship. It can also be part of communal worship. It's something that Christians choose to do—they are not instructed to fast.

Fasting can be hazardous, but if it's done sensibly it does seem that it actually has health benefits. For example it rests the digestive system and allows the body to focus on other systems; it can improve the body's control of blood sugar; and there's also evidence that it enhances heart health and brain function.

Across

Down

- 1 Wrongdoing (James 1:15)
- 2 We should not do this but leave it to Jesus when he comes (James 4:12)
- 6 God's wisdom is this (James 3:17)
- 7 We should not speak this against one another (James 4:11)
- 8 Faith without works is this (James 2:17)
- 11 **14** Across prayed that this would not come (James 5:17)
- 12 In addition (James 1:11)
- 14 A faithful prophet in the Old Testament (James 5:17)
- 15 A friend of the world is this of God (James 4:4)
- 16 We should consider it this when we meet trials (James 1:2)



- 1 Observed (James 5:11)
 - 3 One who doubts is like a wave of the sea done this by the wind (James 1:6)
 - 4 We need to be patient for Jesus' return, just as the farmer waits for this rain (James 5:7)
 - 5 Abraham was justified by works when he would have offered Isaac on this (James 2:21)
 - 8 We are tempted when we are lured and enticed by this (James 1:14)
 - 9 Each day (James 2:15)
 - 10 To resurrect (James 5:15)
 - 13 The mother of Jesus and James (Mark 6:3)
- (These clues use the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

Colin Jannaway

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