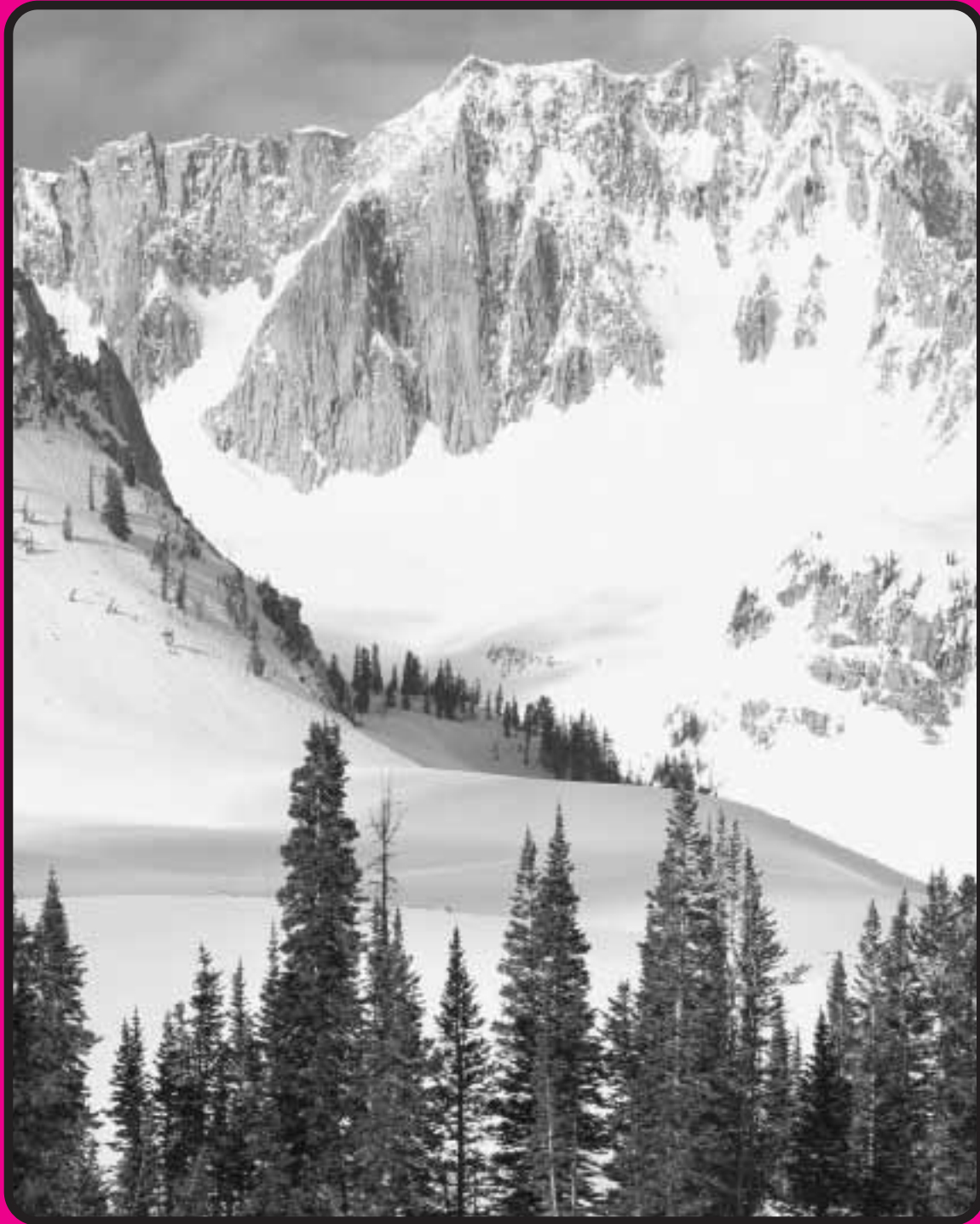


# EVANGEL

*The Good News of Jesus Christ*



# Already

**“Already broken.” What an odd title you might think to yourself. “Already broken. . .” this sounds like something a parent says to a child concerning the Christmas present so recently given. “You mean, it’s already broken?” Indeed, this might be something a parent would say on such an occasion. It might also be something God the Father would have said to Adam and Eve after they took the good gift of being made in his image and they broke it. “Already broken?” In addition, the apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 affirms, “Yes, it’s already broken!”**

## Our world . . . already broken

I think there are very few people in the world who would be naïve enough to say that everything is all right with the world or with this country. There is evidence of an ongoing moral slide. Christian values are being forsaken. Marriage gives way to divorce and shacking up. The unwanted pregnancy can be removed through an abortive procedure. The children are repeating the sins of their parents at a much earlier age.

The world is *already broken*. It has been broken for a very long time. It did not start to break when this beautiful country gave up her traditional family values. It did not start to break when the Enlightenment philosophers abandoned the traditional view of God and his world. It did not start to

break when Caesar declared himself God. It did not start to break when Israel followed false gods. It broke when Adam and Eve and everyone in them took the first bite of the fruit, so pleasing to the eyes and yet so contrary to the command of God. Yes, it is a broken world brought on by the fall into sin.

## Ephesians 2:1 – the reason for brokenness

As Paul moves from teaching the Ephesians about Christ raised from the dead and made to sit in the heavenly places (1:20), he zeros in on the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus. He teaches them that like Christ, indeed by virtue of the work of Christ, they too have been made alive, raised up from the dead!

Paul hits the nail right on the head. He does not skirt the issues. With singleness of focus he says in verse 1 of chapter 2 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.” Now Paul is not just saying of the Ephesians as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. No, of you and of me he says you were dead in sin! Paul is diagnosing the human condition and the news is grim. By nature, each one is dead in his or her sin. As he wrote in Romans 3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Again in Romans 3:23 “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Unless you realize this, you will struggle to understand the things that are going on in the world around you. Unless you realize the sin root, all attempts to deal with society’s problems will fail. If you have weeds in your lawn, you know that mowing them does not get rid of them. If the root is not taken out or destroyed, the weed will grow again. That is a picture of sin and its

effects. Sin must be dealt with at its root. Moreover, to do this in your life you have to recognize what that means for your life.

## Broken . . . and dead!

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live.” Paul will repeat this again in verse 5 where he includes himself, “even when we were dead in transgressions.” Of course some people will hear this and shake their heads. How can the apostle describe people as dead? People are very much alive! Indeed they are, many enjoying that life. You work hard and play hard to get the most out of life. Yet, apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ no matter who you are, how alive you are, Paul says, you are dead! You are dead through your transgressions and sins. Paul points out how by nature you fall short of the mark, that is, you sin. He also points out that by nature you are transgressors. You cross God’s boundaries to pursue the wrong path.

It is important for Paul to use both the word *transgressions* and the word *sins*. Plenty of people today believe that if they do not transgress, that is, if they are good, God will be pleased with them. That is simply not true. God is not pleased because even if you do not think you transgress, you still fall short of his glory and his perfection. Therefore, you are dead. If you remain in sin, you will suffer eternal death! Life apart from God is life on death row. You are the living dead!

## Following broken ways

Paul says to the Ephesians, “in which you used to live, when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,

# Broken



the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Freedom is not doing what you want. Freedom is following God’s ways, but failing to do that, that is, committing sins and transgressions, is following the broken ways of the devil just like Adam and Eve. Those dead in sin are enslaved to the world and its ways, enslaved to the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

The power of Satan at work in the world should never be underestimated. The stream may look calm and appealing, but underneath are the swirling currents waiting to suck you under. The same spirit of sin and slavery is now at work in those who are disobedient, the very same spirit as in Paul’s day. Therefore, in many ways nothing has changed since the time of the Roman Empire. Then as now, there was moral decline. Then as now, life was not cherished as the work of God. Then as now, people followed the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

Where is it most evident that people are dead in sin, following this ruler? Paul answers this question when he adds in verse “All of us also lived among them at one time,

gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.” Every one dead in sin lives to gratify the cravings of their sinful nature, following the desires of body and mind. Paul is not saying that while you live in the world you have fun but Christians cannot have fun. Christians too can enjoy life. They too can enjoy God’s gifts. They too can work and sleep, have sex, and enjoy the labor of their hands.

But when Paul talks about the cravings of our sinful nature, and following the desires of body and mind he is referring to those dead in sin who will not work or work too hard. He is referring to those who will sleep and not do anything else. He is referring to those who have sex, but outside of marriage. He is referring to those who greedily pursue and wantonly spend the labor of their hands. Nevertheless, you, as a Christian, can work six days a week and then enjoy the Sunday of rest and worship God has provided. You can sleep without being a sluggard. You can enjoy the gift of sex within marriage and not outside of it. You can enjoy the labor of your hands without spending wantonly.

You cannot do this while you are by nature objects of wrath, like the rest of this world. In order to forsake the passions of your flesh, and to say no to following the desires of body and mind, you need to be raised up from the dead! What is already broken needs to be fixed. What is dead needs to be raised up!

## Fixing the broken means raising the dead

Can you do it? This question has generated much discussion in the history of the Christian church. Can you do it? Paul’s language in these opening verses is clear. Apart from Christ everyone is *dead* in sin. The dead can do nothing. You can do nothing. Left to your own devices you will follow the ruler of the kingdom of the air. You will live to gratify the cravings of your sinful nature. You will not follow God; you cannot follow God until He comes to you in his grace. Moreover, yes, He has come! Verse five of Ephesians 2 *God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.*

I began with noting the struggles in the world. Maybe you thought it was a pessimistic way to start an article in this magazine distributed to share the good news concerning Jesus Christ. However, let me assure you I am not a pessimist because the story does not end with *already broken* it ends with the gospel of Jesus Christ and God *raising you up* with him. The good news in the midst of a broken world is that God loved this world enough to send his only Son. I encourage you to read on in the next issue about how God has made you alive in Christ.

Doug Vandeburgt

# Christmas:

**Imagine yourself being in the hospital for four weeks with a serious illness and never receiving a visit. Imagine yourself being an orphan and having no parents to love you and take care of you. Imagine yourself being in jail for life and no one ever taking the time to drop by and see how you are doing.**

It does not take much imagination to visualize what that would be like. You would feel yourself to be one of the loneliest and most wretched people living on this earth. Every day again, you lie there in your hospital bed. All other patients in your room have family or friends who drop by for a visit. You do not. Every day again you get up in the morning and go through life alone. Most other young people have parents who love them and take care of them. You do not. Your parents died young and you were left to fend for yourself. No father to take you along on a trip. No mother to hug you. No cozy home to return to at the end of the day. Every day again, you sit in your cell. You've committed a serious crime and now you are paying the price. You are locked up for life just like many of your fellow prisoners. They, however, receive visitors twice a week. You do not. When you were not in jail, you had friends. Now that you are in jail, you appear to have none. For no one ever drops by to see how you are doing.

However, now imagine if all of that changed. Just like with your fellow-prisoners, your friends come by on a regular basis to pay you a visit. A wonderful young couple adopted you into their family and treated you like one of their own children. People came by to visit you

in the hospital. They brought you a little gift with a card telling you they cared and were wishing you a speedy recovery.

It does not take much imagination to figure out what that would feel like. Your loneliness would immediately make way for companionship. Your despondent feelings for feelings of joy. People cared and were concerned for you. You are important to others and matter to them. Others went out of their way to seek you out and give you their love and fellowship. What a dramatic change that has brought about in your life! Why your whole outlook on life and your experience of life has been radically transformed. You have become a completely new person!

Did you know that that is what Christmas is all about. It is about a Someone coming down from heaven and showing his love and concern for us by paying us a visit. A divine visitation from no one else than God Himself. God visiting those who are sick, orphaned and in jail. Allow me to explain.

## A song of praise

Christmas is a time when you hear a lot of singing. You will hear this singing not only in churches, but also in shopping malls. You are walking through one of the malls in your city and all around you can hear those well-known Christmas carols.

What we hear at Christmas time, you also find happening in the Bible. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is preceded and accompanied by songs.

One of those songs is a song known as The Benedictus. It has that title, because the first word in the Latin version of this song is Benedictus which means Praise.

The song is sung by an old man called Zechariah. He and his wife

had just received a child in their old age. A mighty miracle performed by God Himself!

Zechariah, however, not only praises God because of this child, but also because another child would soon be born, namely, Jesus Christ. Zechariah knew this because an angel had told him. And so, in the first part of his Benedictus, he praises God because this child would soon be born.

And he does so because the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ would be a demonstration that God had come down from heaven and visited his people. Just listen to him say so himself: "Praised be the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has visited . . . his people" (Luke 1:68).

## God visits his people

This idea of God visiting his people is, of course, not a new idea. In the past, He had done that many times before. Perhaps, one of the most noteworthy times was when the people of Israel were in Egypt.

Most of the time in Egypt was not very pleasant because the Israelites were slaves of the Egyptian king. Actually, you could say they were prisoners in the land of Egypt. The king made them work very hard every day again. Why at one time, he even had all their baby boys drowned in the Nile River because he was afraid the Israelites were increasing too much in number.

It does not take much imagination to realize how the people must have felt. All that hard labour! Those whips cracking on their backs! Their baby boys being murdered by the king! Had their God forgotten them? Was He aware of their misery? Had He seen all the tears they had shed? Was He concerned about their suffering?

Well, the good news is: God had not forgotten them. And He

# a visit from God

demonstrates this by sending them a liberator called Moses. When He had called Moses to this task, God had said to him, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . . ." (Exodus 3:7,8). This is really the same as saying that God was going to come down and visit his people. Show them that He cared about their miserable condition and would do something about it.

And do something, God did! After ten mighty plagues, God led his people out of the land of Egypt. With a mighty miracle, He led them through the Red Sea while He drowned the Egyptian king with his army in the same sea. Talk about God visiting the prisoners and even setting them free!

The idea of God visiting his people we also find after the birth of Jesus Christ. As you may know, once Jesus grew up and began his public ministry, He healed many who were sick. The blind received their sight back, the deaf their hearing, the lame the use of their legs. Why even the dead sometimes received their life back.

In one of the gospel accounts, we read about Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd of people traveling to a town called Nain. We could paraphrase the event as follows: "As they approached the village gate, they met a funeral procession – a woman's only son was being carried out for burial. And the mother was a widow. When Jesus saw her, his heart broke. He said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then He went over and touched the coffin. The pallbearers stopped. He said, 'Young man, I tell you: Get up.' The dead son sat up and began

talking. Jesus presented him to his mother. All the people realized they were in a place of holy mystery; that God was at work among them. They were quietly worshipful – and then noisily grateful, calling out among themselves, 'God has visited his people!'" (Luke 7:11-16).

Now the interesting thing is, what Jesus does to those in need, He wants us to do as well.

As a matter of fact, we even read in the Bible that this belongs to the essence of what religion is all about. For we read, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

## God sees our real need

Well, this is what Zechariah means in his Benedictus, his hymn of Praise. He praises God for doing what He had done to his people Israel in Egypt. He praises God for what Jesus would do once He began his public ministry. He magnifies God for doing what belongs to the essence of religion: having regard for others, considering their need, seeking them out, showing that He is responsible for them.

Now the beautiful thing is: Zechariah does not just praise God for visiting his people to alleviate them from some physical need. He also praises God for alleviating them from their spiritual need, namely, for setting his people free from their sins and enabling them to worship Him in holiness and righteousness as long as they live (Luke 1:68, 75, 77). For that was the root cause so many were suffering in those days. Many had imprisoned themselves because of their sins and become spiritual orphans by cutting themselves off from God.

Yet, according to Zechariah, Christmas is the good news of God

visiting us especially in that need. Because of the birth and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, God adopts sinners into his family as his sons and daughters. Because of the birth and ministry of the Lord Jesus, God not only visits sinners in the prison of their sins and then leaves again. He actually also opens the doors of this prison and enables them to regain their freedom.

The Lord Jesus Christ would do that when He would die for sinners on Calvary's cross. It was there that He would pay the price they had to pay. It was there that He would lay down his life so that they could have life. It was there that He would be separated from his Father so that they would never have to be separated from Him again.

## God is visiting you

God offers you this life and freedom, too. Especially, at Christmas time God is seeking you out and showing He cares for you by also paying you a visit. Will you open your heart to this visit? Will you receive Him as your guest?

It could very well be that once the Christmas has come and gone, so has your joy and happiness. Much like that person in the hospital, that orphan and that prisoner, you feel something is missing in your life. Outwardly, things may look just fine, but inwardly you miss a life, a freedom and compassion only God can give.

Don't miss out on the real reason for Christmas. It is much more than partying and giving each other some presents. It is receiving God and his Son Jesus Christ into your life because they have come down from heaven to pay you a visit. What will be your response to their seeking you out and showing that they care?

Dick Moes

# Jesus gives bread and life

## BIBLE STORY

Based on Mark 6.30-44 and John 6.1-13

There wasn't anyone in the entire land who had not heard about Jesus yet. His fame was spreading fast. He was able to heal the sick, make the lame walk, drive out evil spirits. And what was more, He taught the people. The people loved to listen to Him when He spoke to them about his Father in Heaven. Because Jesus was the Son of God, He knew exactly how his heavenly Father wanted to be served. In his teaching Jesus showed the people how God demands them to live as his children. In his healing He showed them how God has great compassion on them like a father. God the Father became visible in Jesus.

Not everyone liked what Jesus did and said. Many of the leaders were jealous. They feared that Jesus would become more important than they were. They also did not like it that Jesus was not afraid to tell them what they did wrong. King Herod even killed John the Baptist, who had told the people to follow Jesus.

The death of John the Baptist made Jesus and his group of special students realize that for them, too, the end would come. They, too, would be rejected. They needed time to think about that. They were also tired from the work they had done. The special students, who were called disciples, had traveled from place to place to cure the people from illnesses and evil spirits. Jesus and his disciples needed some rest.

In order to get away from all the work and worry, Jesus told his disciples to get into their boat and sail to the other side of the lake. It was not by far as busy on the other side. There they would find some time to rest and pray. They needed new strength both for their body and for their soul.

But the eager people had kept an eye on them. They had seen that Jesus and his disciples had boarded a boat. All those people who wanted to hear and see more of Jesus knew right away what to do. Without wasting a minute on getting food for the long trip, they rushed after Jesus. They did not have boats. But that was no problem. Driven by the desire to hear more they ran around the lake. As they came through towns and villages they invited the people there to follow them in their pursuit of the great Master. And many did follow. By the time the boat with Jesus and the disciples had reached the other side, a very large crowd was eagerly waiting for him.

Jesus had compassion on them. He did not send them away because He and his disciples needed a well-deserved break. No. These people were like sheep without a shepherd. Their own leaders did not teach them God's truth, but man-made rules. These people needed Him, and convincingly He taught them many more things.

It was getting late. It would not be long anymore till darkness. The disciples became concerned for Jesus and for the crowd. How long would Jesus be able to keep this up? And wouldn't all these people have to eat soon?

The disciples were at a loss. They shouldn't have



been. By now they should have known that Jesus is not limited to human abilities. He had proven so many times that as Son of God He is not bound to what is only humanly possible.

But the disciple needed much time to fully understand that the man Jesus was also the Son of God. Greatly worried they went to Jesus. Didn't He know that it was getting late? Wasn't He aware that everyone was getting hungry? Where would they get the money from to feed this crowd?

Jesus did not share their concern. He knew what He would do about it. He was not angry about their little faith either. Instead, He lovingly addressed their concern. He told his disciples to find out how much food there would be available. Quite soon they located a boy who had five bread-cakes and two fish with him. Not waiting any longer Jesus told his disciples to make the people sit down in groups of fifty and one hundred.

Then Jesus stood up and lifted his eyes to heaven. On behalf of all these people He prayed for a blessing over the food.

Over what food? Over these few flat cakes and two fish?

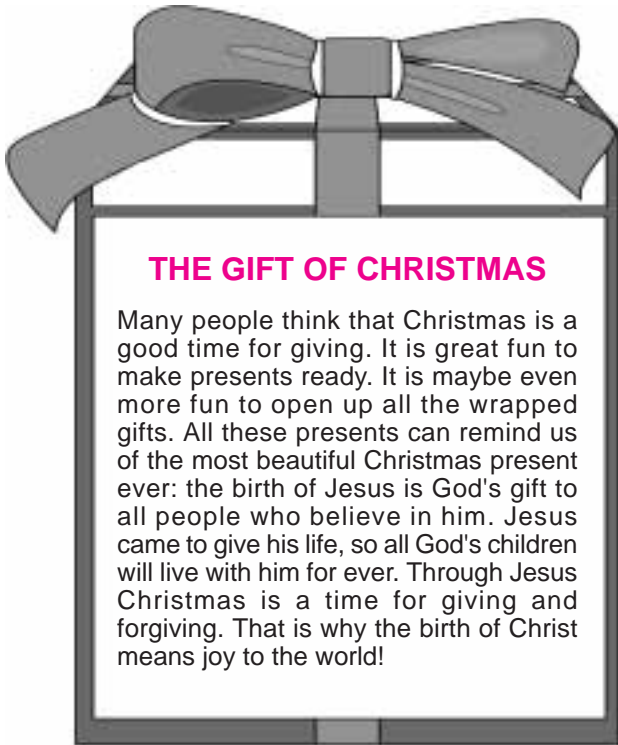
Yes, over these few flat cakes and two fish, but over a lot more too! Watch! After his prayer Jesus takes one of the flat cakes. Then, under the eyes of all these people, a great miracle takes place. As Jesus breaks off piece after piece of cake, he is able to fill a whole basket, and another, and another. The same happens with the fish. The disciples work hard to bring the full baskets to the hungry people. What a sudden abundance of food! Everyone eats till they are fully satisfied. The disciples must go around once more to collect the leftovers. They come back with twelve full baskets. It all seemed so easy, but it really was so astonishing. Jesus fed a crowd of over five thousand people.

It was not till much later that the disciples understood that Jesus could do much more than give food. As they grew in understanding they realized that Jesus did not just give food to the crowd, but eternal life to those to those who believe in Him.

You also can be Jesus' disciple. Believe that He is God's son!

Jane

# Activity Page



## HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT THIS GIFT?

The Bible tells us about the birth of Jesus in Luke 2. "And while Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for him in the village inn."

Read this again and see if you can answer the questions. Which letter is in all your answers, either at the beginning or at the end of the word?

1. Who was the mother of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where was Jesus born? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What did Mary and Joseph use as bed for the baby? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What could not be found for Joseph, Mary and Jesus in the village inn? \_\_\_\_\_

The common letter is the \_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEMADE GIFT

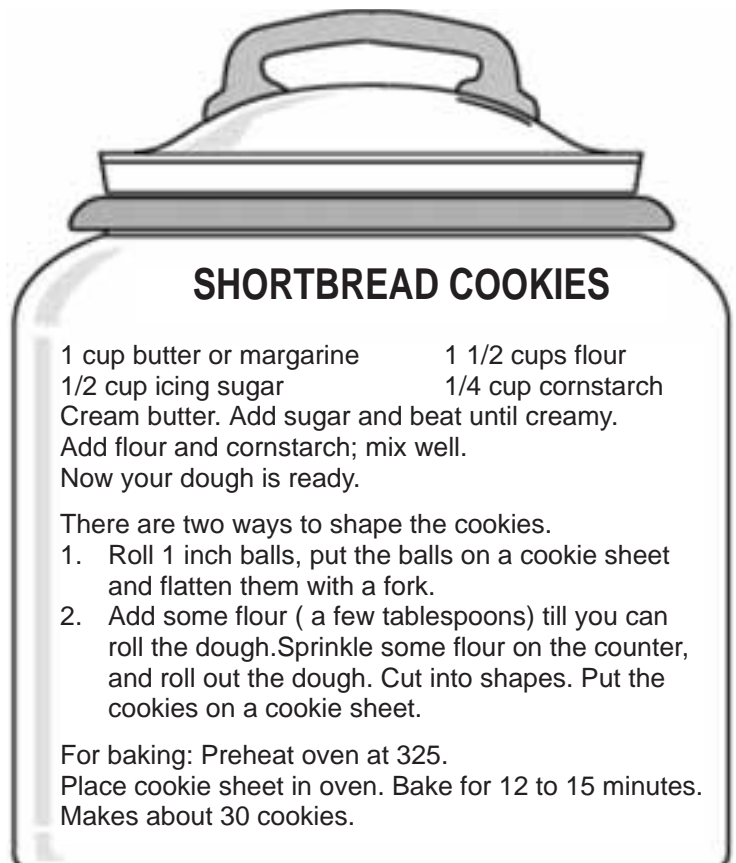
Homemade cookies make a very good gift. You can bake some for your friends, your relatives and even for yourself. When they are ready, you can arrange them on a paper plate or on the lid of an ice cream pail, and cover them with plastic wrap. Put some ribbon around it, stick a bow on top, and there you have a very

personal gift. Ask for permission before you start baking these cookies. When you are very young, you might need the help of an older person.

Remember that ovens can be very hot.



Dawn



# What Luck!

*A messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land."*

*1 Samuel 23:27*

**Some stories in the Bible read like a mystery thriller, full of suspense and danger. Often such stories tell of how the main character in the book is in deep trouble, his life is in great danger, and there seems to be no way out of it this time. That's what it's like here in 1 Samuel 23 too.**

David and his men (about 600 of them) had gone to one of the roughest areas of the land, where there were deep valleys, sharp cliffs, and some dense forests. This was an excellent place, for a rebel like David, to hide from the imperial troops of King Saul. But Saul had some special help from the Ziphites who knew these regions very well. They spied on David and helped Saul to chase him, and that made all the difference for Saul. Things began to look very grim for David. One scout after another came to David with bad news. Just about every one of his hideouts was guarded by Saul's troops, familiar paths he thought nobody knew were being watched, hidden springs were surrounded. But before David could give the order to beat a hasty retreat from this region, another scout came reporting that their last escape route had been cut off.

David was trapped. There was no way out this time. David and his band would have to take a desperate last stand and be overwhelmed by Saul's well-armed and well-trained forces. David had never wanted it to come to this. He had never wanted to be a rebel. No man in Israel was

more loyal to Saul than David. But Saul had forced him to flee for his life because he was jealous of David. And now, David would have to raise his sword and order his men to do the same, to fight against their lord and King.

The suspense is intense. We read, "Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.' Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines."

What an incredible stroke of luck! This message comes just at the right time! Saul never knew how close he had come to finally capture and kill David. Amazing!

But was it luck? That's what a mystery thriller would call it. However, this is not a mystery thriller. It is the story of salvation, and within

that story, this event tells us something that is very important about how God works in the world.

In the Book of Psalms, David tells how he was often in great danger, but when he prayed, God would rescue him, just as God had rescued him here in this chapter. That is how David learned to trust in God. Those who trust in God discover that He is a mighty fortress.

You may face situations in your life when it seems that there just is no way out. It is during those times that you need to trust in God. He's got a plan for your life, and sometimes it unfolds in stressful ways. But his plan for you is good for those who love Him and trust in Him for the sake of Jesus Christ. He always rescues those who trust in Him. Learn to pray to God and give the future over to Him, and simply serve Him in the best way you can. Sooner or later, the beauty of God's plan for your life will unfold.

Luck has nothing to do with it!

P. Aasman

## EVANGEL

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