

ADVENT: WEEK FOUR

Christmas Eve

Bishop of Christmas

Luke 1:68-69 & 78; 1 Peter 2:25



Years ago, I read about the Bishop of Christmas. “Bishop” is the noun form of the Greek word EPISCOPUS. It’s where we get the English word EPISCOPAL, and in modern usage it refers to things regarding the Church. But the root of that word also gives us another, more common, English word: SCOPE.

A scope is an instrument we use to look at things. We use a microscope to look carefully at what is close by, and we use a telescope to study what is far away. So, an EPISCOPUS, or a BISHOP, is someone who looks at something closely. In ancient Greece, a Bishop was a general who periodically visited various units of the army to inspect them very closely. If they were alert and ready for battle, the Bishop was pleased. If they were unprepared for his visit, if they were casual and slacking, the Bishop would rebuke them, or even punish them.

So it should be no surprise that the VERB form of that Greek word EPISCOPUS means “TO VISIT”. But it wasn’t used to describe a casual, drop-in visit to give someone a present and have a glass of eggnog. It was used to describe a visit by someone who cared very deeply about those he is visiting, and someone who was going to be carefully studying the people and the situation in which he found them.

As a pastor, one of my tasks is to serve as a bishop for the people God brings under my care. As a bishop, I am commanded in Scripture to visit, comfort, provide for them, to carefully study my people and address the needs they have. But I am not at the top of the org chart...not by a million miles! The Bible says that Jesus is the supreme Bishop. He has every human being on the planet under His scope. His watchful eyes are on each one of us, every second of every day. He is so dedicated to His task as Bishop that He even numbers the hairs of our heads...makes a note each time we sit down or stand up...records every single thought we think.

But Jesus is not a Bishop only in the NOUN form, He is also a Bishop in the VERB form. He does visit us...as BISHOP. The Bible is filled with this image. In the Old Testament we hear many prophets telling of the visitation of God, a day that could be one of great rejoicing and happiness, or a day of sorrow and judgment. It all depended on how well-prepared the people were when the Bishop decided to make His visit.

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And that brings us to today...because on the first Christmas, the Supreme Bishop came to visit us in the flesh. He even shows up in the story as the Bishop! In the passages you read today, Zachariah mentions the divine visitation of God twice, and in both cases he uses the verb form of EPISCOPUS. The Bishop has visited His people with REDEMPTION, SALVATION and TENDER MERCY. This is the reason that later on in the New Testament we find this beautiful name for Jesus again in the passage you read from 1 Peter. We discover here that Jesus Christ is the Bishop of your SOUL. Your soul is made up of your MIND, WILL and EMOTIONS. Jesus visited, but not as a general to inspect the troops. Instead, He came as a baby in a feeding trough because He wanted a true close-up inspection of the human condition! And He didn't come to tell you how badly you failed. No, Jesus came to care for your soul...to heal and restore your MIND...to redeem your wayward WILL...to overcome the EMOTIONS that have overcome you. He came to make a way of redemption for you, to provide salvation for you, and to shower you with tender mercy.

But...it was that same MERCY that caused Jesus to leave us with a divine warning. Before He returned to heaven, the Bishop of Christmas announced to the world that at some future date He would make a second visit. For those who are waiting passionately for His return, and who are living passionately for His glory...for those who are committed to seeing His kingdom come and His will to be done in their lives, and through their lives, in this old world...for THOSE people His next visit will be just like the first one: a time of indescribable joy and glory.

On the other hand, for those who have never opened His gift of salvation and redemption, for those who are living as though the Bishop is never returning, the Bishop's second visit will be the worst day of their lives.

So this Christmas Eve, let me simply remind us all of this astounding reality: the SCOPE of the Supreme Bishop is upon each of our lives. It penetrates every pretense, every guise, every barrier. The Bishop of our souls sees what others may not see. He tells us in Scripture that nothing is hidden from the eyes of the one Who oversees our souls.

But never forget that the reason for His meticulous study of our lives is His TENDER MERCY. He truly cares for our souls! So, whether for the first time, or just again at this time, will you welcome the Bishop at

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Christmastime?



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prayer:



Lord Jesus, thank You for Your beautiful devotion to me! I am so unworthy, but so grateful for Your watchful care! As You heal and restore my soul, please align my entire being with Your heart for Your purposes. Whatever You need to do in me to prepare me for Your next visit to this old world...do it. I yield to Your work in my life with gratitude and hope. In Jesus's name, amen.

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