



OPINION

The Christmas Story

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

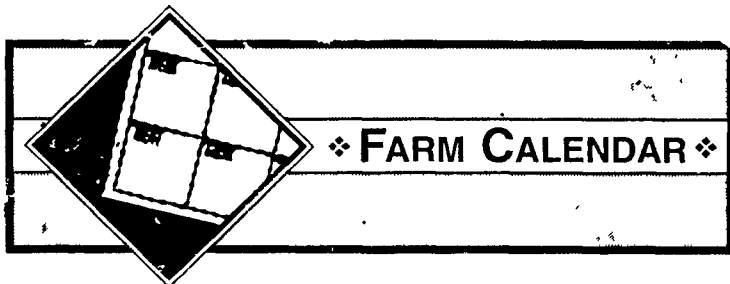
And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them; Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child. All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace

Holy Bible



- Saturday, December 25**
Merry Christmas!
- Friday, December 31**
Lancaster Farming office closed, 2000
- Monday, January 3**
Lancaster County Tobacco Show, Farm and Home Center, Lancaster, judging noon.
- Tuesday, January 4**
Risky Business-Solutions, Financial Management Seminar, Fogelsville, 9 a.m.
- Solanco Young Farmer Program, Money Management In The Ag Enterprise, Solanco High School, 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, January 5**
Crop Insurance: Making It Work For You!, Lebanon County Expo Center, Lebanon, 9 a.m.
- Thursday, January 6**
Adams County Holstein Association Annual Meeting, York Springs Fire Hall, York Springs, 7 p.m.
- Bucks-Montgomery Dairy Day, Family Heritage Restaurant, 9:30 a.m.-2:45 p.m.
- Vegetable Growers' Study Circle, Kutztown Produce Auction, 7

- Friday, January 7**
Crop Insurance: Making It Work For You!, York County 4-H Center, 9 a.m.
- Franklin County Dairy Day, Kauffman's Community Center, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- Dairy Farm Management Basics, Two-Day Session, Lancaster Farm and Home Center, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., also Jan. 14.
- Berks County Dairy Day, Berks County Ag Center, Leesport.
- Schuylkill County Dairy Day, Penn State Schuylkill Campus, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- Saturday, January 8**
Pennsylvania Farm Show, Farm Show Complex, Harrisburg, thru Jan. 13.
- Sunday, January 9**
Beyond Cheddar 2000 at the Pa. Farm Show, Family Living Center, 2 p.m.- 3 p.m.
- Monday, January 10**
- Tuesday, January 11**
Farmers' Market Association Leadership and Communication Skills Workshop, NYS Dept. of Agricultural Markets, Albany, N.Y., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Morrison's Cove Produce Auction



Now Is The Time
By John Schwartz
Lancaster County Agricultural Agent

To Apply For Federal Crop Disaster Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has \$1.2 billion for the Crop Disaster Program (CDP) for farmers who suffered losses to 1999 crops due to natural disasters. Drought farmers are eligible for compensation for 1999 crop losses directly attributed to adverse weather conditions. The payment formulas provide greater benefits to farmers who bought insurance on their eligible crops in 1999. Farmers did not have to take out crop insurance in 1999 in order to receive payments. However, as a condition of receiving benefits under this program, farmers who did not insure 1999 crops are required to purchase crop insurance in 2000 and 2001 for all insurable crops they grow. Payments to farmers will be prorated after all applications are reviewed in order to stay within the program's budget. Sign up began Dec. 13, 1999 and ends February 25, 2000. Farmers should contact their local USDA Service Center or Farm Service Agency office for more information.

To Understand Crop Disaster Payments

Under the federal Crop Disaster Program (CDP), farmers will be compensated if their losses exceed 35 percent of historic yields. Farmers with eligible losses of insured crops will be compensated at 65 percent of crop insurance market price elections. Farmers with eligible losses to insurable crops will be compensated at 65 percent of the five year average National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) price. Yields will be based on the higher of the five year NASS county average yield or the crop insurance APH yield or non-insured crop disaster assistance approved yield. Payments are limited to \$80,000 per person. No one with an annual gross income of \$2.5 million or more is eligible for CDP payments.

To Apply For State Disaster Grants

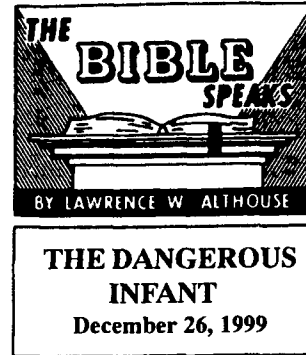
The Commonwealth of

- meeting, Martinsburg.
- FSA Production Workshop, Lebanon Valley Ag Center, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., also Jan. 13, 25, and Feb. 8 and 16.
- Wednesday, January 12**
- Thursday, January 13**
Mexico Vegetable Growers meeting, Mexico.
- Friday, January 14**
Crop Insurance: Making It Work For You!, Cochranville Fire Hall, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Pennsylvania has created an emergency drought relief program in the form of crop loss assistance grants for farmers who suffered crop loss due to the 1999 drought. The \$60 million state program is in addition to any crop loss assistance under the federal Crop Disaster Program (CDP). There is also \$5.6 million available to assist farmers in meeting the requirement to purchase federal crop insurance for 2000 and 2001. Pennsylvania farmers who meet eligibility criteria of the USDA CDP are also eligible for the Pennsylvania program. To be considered, farmers must apply at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and meet the eligibility criteria for the 1999 CDP. In addition, farmers must sign a Pennsylvania

Department of Agriculture (PDA) Drought Relief Program Application and Waiver of Confidentiality form available at the local FSA office. PDA will calculate a state crop assistance grant from the USDA application information. The amount of the state grant, if any, will not exceed 75 percent of the amount you receive under the federal program. Upon completion of the one page PDA form, the FSA office will send the information to PDA. The Pennsylvania program will follow the same sign-up period as the federal CDP, Dec. 13, 1999 to February 25, 2000. For additional information contact your local FSA office or PDA at 717-787-4737.

Feather Prof.'s Footnote: "Focus: If you chase two rabbits, both will escape."



Background Scripture:
Matthew 2.
Devotional Reading:
Psalms 98.

It is difficult to imagine that an infant can be dangerous. Traditionally, infants are the epitome of innocence. But there are some children who are marked for enmity before they enter this world, even before they have an opportunity to evoke someone's displeasure or opposition. Jesus of Nazareth was one such infant, in fact, he was the most marked infant ever to enter this world for he was regarded as dangerous.

Actually, King Herod was right, Jesus is dangerous — as infant, grown man or resurrected Lord. Of course, Herod was thinking about the stability of his kingdom. Herod was not born a prince of the Jews; by bribery he gained the support of Anthony soon after the victory of Anthony and Octavian at Philippi. He was declared King of the Jews by the Emperor August in 40 BC. A true Jewish messiah (Herod was not really Jewish but Idumaeon) would be very threatening to his hold over the Jewish people. Killing this child would make his reign more secure.

Spiritual Power

In reality, Jesus was never intended to be a threat to Herod in that way. The kingdom that Jesus would claim was not a kingdom of flesh and blood but of the spirit. The same is true today: political and temporal authority are threatened by Jesus Christ, not because he is likely to claim earthly power, but it is his spiritual power that makes him so dangerous. In the long run, spiritual power undermines and supersedes every other kind. If you are going to fear something, make certain that it is spiritual instead of temporal.

The danger of this babe in swaddling clothes in an animal's feed trough is also symbolized by the wise men who come seeking him, for these men represent a threat to our sense of ownership of the Christ. Of course they were not Christians (for Christians had not yet been invented) and neither were they Jews. What little we may deduce from what Matthew writes of them is that they were from somewhere east of Palestine.

Scholars tend to believe that they represented a learned class in Persia. Their religion or religions would be foreign and distasteful to the Jews.

Astrologers

Furthermore, the men were astrologers: "For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." It would surprise many Christians to learn that astrology and Christianity enjoyed a mutual relationship for many centuries. Many of the fine cathedrals of Europe abound in astrological symbols and art. It is only in modern times that many Christians have assumed that astrology was a rival religion and a threat to the gospel. This is not the time and place to go into a protracted discussion of that issue, but it does illustrate for us Jesus Christ is dangerous to our sense of ownership of the kingdom of God. The fences we build to keep the truth in and the strangers out are a sham and pretense. We cannot, must not tell God where and how he can operate in his world. The gospel is not our private possession. When we assume ownership of the gospel we are on the ragged edge of blasphemy.

When Herod realized that the wise men (notice Matthew doesn't say there are three of them) had tricked him, he has killed all the male children of Bethlehem up to two years old. The Baby Jesus was unwittingly dangerous for innocent children. That, too, is true today. As an adult Jesus was forthright about the danger: "... they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake" (Lk. 21:12). "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you..." (Ja. 15:20). In fact, Jesus sees grace in this tragedy: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Mt. 5:10).

This is a sobering note in the midst of the joy of Christmas. But without this note of warning, without this acknowledgement of the danger this infant represents, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ would be just another fairytale, pleasant to hear but irrelevant to the place and time in which we live.

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