

Blessed Art Thou Among Women
or The Woman who Paid her Debt

By
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“Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

In the broad sweep of earth's unnumbered years, there is no date on the calendar which marks the outstanding events of the past around which is gathered more sentiment and heart-warming tenderness than the Bethlehem manger. After all these years, it heads the list of holiday seasons throughout the annual cycle. Universal interest in its observance is still on the increase. In fact, it marks the culmination of all that went before it, and it is the starting point of all that has been and all that is to follow.

In the dawn of creation when the morning stars sang together, the entire universe was in perfect tune with the pulse beat of the eternal creator. Discord was a foreign term. Disease, decay, and death were strangers to the fair land where the first man and woman walked and talked with God. But alas, into the melody of that fair day the black night of sin made a gruesome invasion.

Satan, the author of that heart-rending nightmare, selected the masterpiece of the creator's genius as the victim of his diabolical scheme. When the deed was done and the breach was made and all creation began to groan beneath the curse of an awful sin, the most beautiful creature of paradise stood alone with the index finger of condemnation pointing in her direction. She was the first transgressor. Had the influence of this first transgression died with the first offender, all would have been different. But in tragic pandemonium, the confusion, dismay, disease and death that fastened its serpentine fangs

into the heart of Mother Eve became the ruthless virus that poisoned the blood stream of all her children.

The nature of this perpetual blight upon men forced the first offender under an eternal obligation to the human race. The character of the woman herself gives her the capacity to suffer the most intense remorse in continual payment for her crime. Her tender heart, sensitive soul, her matchless love for her offspring has been the medium through which the agencies of sin have struck back at her with the cruel dagger of punishment to make her pay ten thousand fold for her disobedience. No one can love like a mother or suffer so deeply. Throughout the ageless past, she has forever stood at every danger point directing those whom she loves to the ark of safety. The path into the valley of the shadow is a well beaten path for her.

She has run the gauntlet of sorrow unto the end.

She hath drunk the bitter cup of anguish to its blackest dregs.

She hath seen sin work out its finished product in her children.

She hath marched with them to the gallows.

She has seen them fill a Christless grave, yet for all her suffering, her tears, and her sorrow, she had not paid her great debt to man. She could not atone for her transgression; she could not lift the curse. She finally stood amazed in a land where slavery, greed, and lust was running wild. The havoc of her first sin had reached a most terrible velocity. The entire world like a condemned man with the death rattle in his throat was staggering along the rim of ruin to doom. But in that dark hour when all hope was gone, the woman who had labored so long under the obligation of her stupendous debt to the race, with one mighty sweep of the bands of her undying love, lifted her soul

to an unchallenged throne of honor when she gave her entire being to be the agency of the Holy Ghost in the last desperate effort to redeem herself and the uncounted millions whom she had drawn into sin.

Marvelous miracle that when the angel Gabriel stood by the virgin Mary and made the greatest announcement that had ever fallen upon the leaden ears of a weary world, sick of sin, and ready to perish. Expectant mothers for four thousand years had prayed a constant prayer that perhaps their first born would somehow lift the stigma of that awful guilt that the first mother had thrust upon the world. The mothers of Israel had prayed to be honored with the gift of a deliverer, but one never came. On and on the world suffered. And then with a sudden burst of heavenly melodies, the hills of Judea were alive with singing angels. The sleeping shepherds were awakened by the rustle of angel wings and the strains of celestial music floating down out of the sky. They looked up from their drowsy slumber into the heavens to see a blazing meteor moving with unerring precision across the trackless firmament to finally stop directly above a manger in the little town of David. The angel voices became clearer and out of the night came the long awaited message. A child is born, yes, born of a woman. At last the woman redeems herself. She gives to the world a child that promises to be the Messiah, the Deliverer, and the one that shall pay her debt that she could not pay.

The most fitting tribute to be paid to Mary is “many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.” With all the contributions that womankind had made to the world before the babe was born in Bethlehem, the world was still in bondage and womankind was still in debt. But when the Virgin came forth from the valley of the shadow with a man child in her arms, her debt was paid ten thousand fold. One question

ordinarily would be forth coming: Why can we say this about the son of one woman? The answer, of course, is based upon the character of the man who was born.

Oh, what a figure was this son of Mary. To whom shall we go to get an answer? It is true that he died at the age of 33. He was driven like a sheep to the slaughter even as he was standing on the threshold of youth. His sun was hanging in a morning sky when the hammer of death fastened his hands and feet to a Roman cross. While the blush of youth was still on his cheeks and long before his black locks ever knew a tinge of gray, he had to die. But all of the men who have ever lived could not do for the world in all of their life what Jesus did in only three and a half years. The witnesses of his deeds of mercy and love and salvation are uncounted tonight and that number is still multiplying. We could do no better in evaluating his worth to man than to let the blind whom he made to see answer. Let the lepers whom he cleansed answer. Let those who saw their dead raised to life answer.

Once again the birthday of this peasant Galilean draws nigh. Once thousand nine hundred and forty-eight years have rolled by since the angels sang to the shepherds and the star in the east appeared. Long and weary have been these centuries. The star that appeared that night has long since vanished into the far vaults of the space. The shepherds who heard the angels sing have long since turned to dust. A hundred generations have come and gone since that far off night. Many kings have ruled and reigned. Many wars have been fought. And this old world is hoary with age. But as the Christmas season draws upon us, the pulse beat of the entire universe is quickened. The memory of the manger child warms the coldest hearts. It still sends men out in the streets to do some kind deed for an unfortunate fellow. Little children from the warm foothills of Dixie to

the Land of the Midnight Sun will once again unite their voices and sing together: "Peace on the earth, good will to men." Even those who are treading the last miles of life's way will revive at the thought of Christmas, and with memories of the long ago flooding their souls, they will break out and sing, "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright."

All of the sentiment that gathers around the manger would be worth nothing to men but for the gruesome spectacle that occurred out on the hill called Calvary. It was truly out there that Woman paid her debt. Behold her as she stands there in the shadow of the cross.

She gave him birth in the privations of a cattle stall.

She fled with him in her arms to Egypt to escape the king's sword.

She lived with him on the fare of a peasant in the little town of Nazareth.

She stood with him when all men forsook him.

When others called him an imposter, she still believed in him.

When he was led to the cross, she followed him, weeping as she went.

When he was suffering the tortures of loneliness, she was there.

She was looking upon him when his head fell down upon his breast and he was dead. She then could have pointed a dying world to the mangled form of her lifeless son and said, "This is my gift to men." In this, I have paid my debt in full.

That night when in the Judean skies
The mystic star dispensed its light,
A blind man moved in his sleep
And dreamed that he had sight.

That night when shepherds heard the song
Of hosts angelic choiring near,
A deaf man stirred in slumbers spell
And dreamed that he could hear.

That night when in the cattle stall
Slept child and mother cheek by jowl,
A cripple turned his twisted limbs
And dreamed that he was whole.

That night when o'er the newborn babe
The tender Mary rose to lean,
A loathsome leper smiled in sleep
And dreamed that he was clean.

That night when to the mother's breast
The little king was held secure,
A harlot slept a happy sleep
And dreamed that she was pure.

That night when in the manger lay
The sanctified who came to save,
A man moved in the sleep of death
And dreamed there was no grave.