

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

Read It Again...

Few things bring me more joy than reading stories to our grandchildren. When Samara (age 5) and Liam (age 3) snuggle up close to me on the sofa and say, "Read us a story, Papa," well, life just doesn't get better than that! But when I come to the end and close the book, I often hear a loud protest shouted in unison: "Read it again! Read it again!" I confess that I've read *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss so many times I've lost almost all appetite for eggs.

While we may debate the value of re-reading silly children's books, there is no debate when it comes to the story of Christmas. This is a story we want to hear—no, we *need* to hear—over and over again. At times, the words may sound like a litany of things we already know, but then the reality suddenly breaks through afresh: God loved the world so much he gave his only Son. Yes, yes, tell me *that* story again!

This edition of *The High Calling* glories in redundancy. Choosing from a wide range of preachers and authors, past

and present, we wanted to give you the privilege that every child should have: hearing the Christmas story repeated again and again. Your mind will be stimulated and your heart will be warmed as you listen to the story we already know. But if you are mature enough to become childlike (Matthew 18:3), you will be immensely blessed. In fact, when you get to the last page you will surely say, "Read it again!"

Katy and I send love and prayers to you in this blessed season.



Stanley Key

A Christmas Question—Isaiah 9:6

By Charles H. Spurgeon[†]



“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” The sentence is a double one, but it has in it no tautology. The careful reader will soon discover a distinction. “Unto us a *child* is born, unto us a *Son* is given.” As Jesus Christ is a child in his human nature, he is born, born of the Virgin Mary, as truly-born as any other man that ever lived.... But as Jesus Christ is God's Son, he is not born; but given, begotten of his Father from before all worlds, begotten—not made, being of the same substance with the Father.

This morning, however, the principal object of my discourse is to bring out the force of those two little words, “unto us.” For you will perceive that here the full force of the passage lies. “For unto us a child is born,

[†] Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was converted as a teenager in a Primitive Methodist Chapel. In adulthood he pastored the New Park Street Baptist Chapel in London for 38 years. He is one of the greatest preachers in the history of the church. This sermon was preached on Sunday morning, December 25, 1859, at Exeter Hall, Strand. The text here, taken from The Spurgeon Archive (www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0291.htm), has been shortened and the language updated.

unto us a Son is given.” The divisions of my discourse are very simple ones. First, *is it so?* Secondly, *if it is so, what then?* Thirdly, *if it is not so, what then?*

In the first place: **is it so?** It is a fact that a child is born. We receive it as a fact, more fully established than any other fact in history, that the Son of God became man, was born at Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. It is a fact, too, that a Son is given. God has given his only begotten Son to be the Savior of men. But the matter of question is this: Is this child born *to us?* Is he given *to us?* This is the matter of anxious enquiry. Do we know that he is our Savior?... Many Christians seem to be the very picture of godliness; their life is admirable, but yet they are always crying,

“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?”

See, my hearers, whether you can say, “Unto me this Son is given.” If I cannot say he loved me and gave himself *for me*, of what avail is all the merit of his righteousness, or all the plenitude of his atonement?

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This brings me to my second head: **if it is so, what then?** If it is so, why am I doubtful today? Why is my spirit questioning? Why do I not realize the fact? My hearer, if the Son is given to you, how is it that you are today asking whether you are Christ's, or not? Why do you not labor to make your calling and election sure?... Never rest until you can say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Give no sleep to your eyes, and no slumber to your eyelids, till you have read your "title clear to mansions in the skies."

I come to my last head: **if it is not so, what then?** My dear hearer, if Christ is not yours this morning, may the Spirit of God help you to confess your sins; not into my ear, nor into the ear of any living man. Go to your chamber and confess to God that you are vile. Tell him you are a wretch undone without his sovereign grace... It is the least that you can do, to acknowledge your sin; and though there be no merit in the confession, yet true to his promise, God will give you pardon through Christ.

**Every spirit that confesses that
Jesus Christ has come in the
flesh is from God (I John 4:2).**

Then, when you have made a confession, I beseech you renounce yourself. You have been resting perhaps in some hope that you would make yourself better, and so save yourself. Give up that delusive fancy. You have seen the silk-worm: it will spin, and spin, and spin, and then it will die where it has spun itself a shroud. And your good works are but a spinning for yourself a robe for your dead soul. You can do nothing by your best prayers, your best tears, or your best works, to merit eternal life... Now, give up *self*.

Lastly, when you have confessed your sin and given up all hope of self-salvation, go to the place where Jesus died in agony. Go then in meditation to Calvary. There he hangs... I see his visage more marred than that of any man. I see the drops of blood still standing round his pierced temples—marks of that rugged thorn-crown. Ah, I see his body naked—naked to his shame... See there his hands rent with the rough iron, and his feet torn with the nails... Hear him! He cries, "It is finished!" and he gives up the ghost. The atonement is finished, the price is paid, the sacrifice is accepted. Sinner, believe in Christ. Cast yourself on him. Throw your trembling arms around that bleeding body. Sit now at the feet of that cross, and feel the dropping of the precious blood. And as you go out each one of you say in your hearts,

*"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ's kind arms I fall,
He is my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all."*

God Came Near

By Max Lucado[†]



Angels watched as Mary changed God's diaper. The universe watched with wonder as The Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him. And had the synagogue leader in Nazareth known who was listening to his sermons...

Jesus may have had pimples. He may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on him or vice-versa. It could be that his knees were bony. One thing's for sure: He was, while completely divine, completely human.

For thirty-three years he would feel everything you and I have ever felt. He felt weak. He grew weary. He was afraid of failure. He was susceptible to wooing women. He got colds, burped, and had body odor. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. And his head ached.

To think of Jesus in such a light is—well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. Clean the manure from around the manger. Wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Pretend he never snored or blew his nose or hit his thumb with a hammer.

He's easier to stomach that way. There is something about keeping him divine that keeps him distant, packaged, predictable. But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out.

[†] *God Came Near*. Multnomah Press, 1987: pp. 26–27.

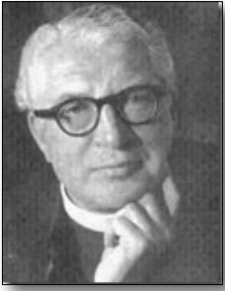
Nativity

By John Donne (c. 1608)

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves his well-beloved imprisonment,
There he hath made himself to his intent
Weak enough, now into our world to come;
But oh, for thee, for him, hath th'inn no room?
Yet lay him in this stall, and from the orient,
Stars, and wisemen will travel to prevent
Th'effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
See'st thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how he
Which fills all place, yet none holds him, doth lie?
Was not his pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss him, and with him into Egypt go,
With his kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

He Is Here—John 1:14

By W. E. Sangster†



E Stanley Jones has told a story of a little boy who stood before a picture of his absent father, and then turned to his mother and said wistfully, “I wish Father would step out of the picture.” That little boy expressed, in his own way, the deepest hope of the deepest souls who lived before Christ. They believed in God! Socrates and Plato did—the finest of the Greeks. The ancient Eastern sages did—Gautama, the Buddha; Lao-tzu, the Chinese teacher; Akhenaten, the most profoundly religious of the Pharaohs. With overpowering intensity the Hebrew prophets did—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the rest of them. They believed in God! They believed that God could be seen in nature. He had made the world. In many ways it was a picture of him. Indeed, the most daring of them came to believe that the great Creator of the universe might be called a Father... If only the Father would step out of the picture.

Listen! Listen! He *stepped* out of the picture. He stepped out at Bethlehem. Here is the glorious truth of it: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” If the Father has stepped out of the picture, do we not know the true nature of the world, of God, and of ourselves?

Christ’s coming tells us the true nature of the world... It is not the devil’s world, nor yet really man’s world. It is God’s world! Rebellious—admittedly—but still his!... In the frustration and bitterness of the hour, come and pause by the manger and hear the truth... This baby is Almighty God. He will grow and struggle with the world, and as he leaves it... will say this to all who care to listen, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

† William E. Sangster (1900–1960) was a prominent Methodist preacher and author who pastored churches in Liverpool, Scarborough, Leeds, and London. This sermon is taken from Sangster’s *Special-Day Sermons* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960:pp. 17-24).

Christ’s coming tells us the true nature of God...

This Jesus was “the image of the invisible God,” the one who when Philip said, “Show us the Father,” answered, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”... “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

Christ’s coming gives us the truth about ourselves....

Whenever I meditate on myself, I am brought very soon to depression. There is such a contrast between the man I want to be and the man I am. A wide gulf divides the ideal of holiness I carry in my heart and my meager achievements. Even when my deeds pass my scrutiny, my motives don’t.... Then I come to Bethlehem—and move to Nazareth, and to Capernaum, and follow Jesus through his lovely life. Here I see the man I ought to be. So my longings after holiness are not an illusion!... I concede that there are senses in which, as I dwell upon his moral triumph, I only deepen my own depression. But only momentarily.... He puts his hand on my shoulder and says, “You do not belong to the piggery. You belong to me!” He stoops and lifts me from the dirt and tells me that he loved me enough to forsake



the courts of heaven;... that he came as a babe and lived this life to show me how it could be done, then stretched himself on the wood at the last and died to redeem me. Is that the truth about me? Was I dear enough for God to be born? Was I dear enough for God to die? Let no man tell me now that I am worthless...

The Father *has stepped out of the picture*. I have the truth about the world. I have the truth about God. I have the truth about myself.

The Cross Over the Manger—Matthew 2:13–23

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer[†]



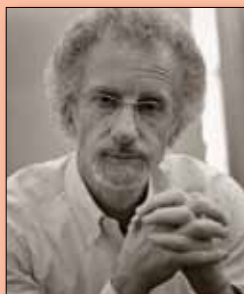
My dear congregation! I am sure that you have noticed at the end of these familiar stories (in our text)—the flight to Egypt, the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem, and the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth—each time there is a phrase from the Old Testament, and these words are introduced by, “So was fulfilled what was said.” ...That means that nothing could happen to Jesus which God had not already determined beforehand. That also means that if we are with Jesus, nothing can happen to us which God has not already decided and promised beforehand. Despite all the thinking, planning, and mistakes that we humans make, even the gruesome hands of the murderous Herod play their part. Finally everything goes the way that God had foreseen, had wanted, and had spoken. God never lets the control go out of his hands. That is a

[†] Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was a professor, pastor, and writer in Germany between the two world wars. He refused to take the loyalty oath to Adolph Hitler and eventually was invited to participate in a plot to assassinate him. For this he was arrested, imprisoned, and executed just before the end of the war. This sermon, preached on the first Sunday of the new year, January 1940, was taken from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christmas Sermons (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005: pp. 134-143*).

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The Visited Planet

By Philip Yancey[†]



Before Jesus, almost no pagan author had used “humble” as a compliment. Yet the events of Christmas point inescapably to what seems like an oxymoron: a humble God. The God who came to earth came not in a raging whirlwind nor in a devouring fire. Unimaginably, the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down, so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager. “Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,” marveled the poet John Donne. He “made himself nothing... he humbled himself,” said the apostle Paul more prosaically.

I remember sitting one Christmas season in a beautiful auditorium in London listening to Handel’s *Messiah*, with a full chorus singing about the day when “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” I had spent the morning in museums viewing remnants of England’s glory—the crown jewels, a solid gold ruler’s mace, the Lord Mayor’s gilded carriage—and it occurred to me that just such images of wealth and power must have filled the minds of Isaiah’s contemporaries who first heard that promise. When the Jews read Isaiah’s words, no doubt they thought back with sharp nostalgia to the glory days of Solomon, when, “the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones.”

The Messiah who showed up, however, wore a different kind of glory, the glory of humility. “God is great,” the cry of the Moslems, is a truth which needed no supernatural being to teach men,” writes Father Neville Figgis. “That *God is little*, that is the truth which Jesus taught man.” The God who roared, who could order armies and empires about like pawns on a chessboard, this God emerged in Palestine as a baby who could not speak or eat solid food or control his bladder, who depended on a teenager for shelter, food, and love.

In London, looking toward the auditorium’s royal box where the queen and her family sat, I caught glimpses of the more typical way rulers stride through the world: with bodyguards, and a trumpet fanfare, and a flourish of bright clothes and flashing jewelry.... In meek contrast, God’s visit to earth took place in an animal shelter with no attendants present and nowhere to lay the newborn king but a feed trough. Indeed, the event that divided history, and even our calendars, into two parts may have had more animal than human witnesses. A mule could have stepped on him. “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.”



[†] This passage is taken from Yancey’s book *The Jesus I Never Knew* (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995: pp. 36–37*).

great consolation: God only fulfills what God himself has promised. Anyone who has the Holy Scriptures in his hand and in his heart will again and again have evidence for this great consolation....

With immeasurable agitation and jealousy, Herod now ordered the murder of all the children of Bethlehem under the age of three. He thought that in this way he would be sure to catch the divine child. But clever and gruesome as this massacre was, it failed in its objective. Herod wanted to get rid of the Christ, but Christ lived on... The innocent children of Bethlehem... were the first martyrs of Christendom... All persecution has as its aim to get rid of Jesus Christ, to kill the Christ child, but it can never harm him. Christ lives, and with him are the martyrs of all time....

So it was in the time of Rachel, the mother of the people of Israel, whose grave lies near to Bethlehem, Rachel weeping for all her children. It was in the last days of Jerusalem before it fell to the Babylonians, when the prophet Jeremiah looked down upon the tragedy and wept. But it was now, when the mothers of Bethlehem wept for their children,

for whom Jesus Christ died, that the full meaning of the prophet's words were revealed: *A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more (Jer. 31:15)....*



It is the weeping over the world, estranged from God and hostile to Christ, over the blood of the innocent, over the world's own guilt and sin, for whom Jesus Christ himself came to suffer. But in the midst of all this inconsolable weeping, there is a great consolation: Jesus Christ lives and we will live with him, if we suffer with him....

We are about to enter a new year. Many human plans and failures, much human hostility and distress will certainly accompany our way. But so long as we remain with Jesus and walk with him,

we can be certain that nothing can happen to us other than that which God has foreseen, wished, and promised. It is the consolation of a life lived with Jesus that what was said of him will also be true for us: "So was fulfilled what the Lord had said." Amen.

A Hymn of the Incarnation

By Charles Wesley

Glory be to God on high,
And peace on earth descend!
God comes down, he bows the sky,
And shows himself our friend:
God the invisible appears!
God, the blest, the great I AM,
Sojourns in this vale of tears,
And Jesus is his name.

Him the angels all adored,
Their Maker and their King.
Tidings of their humbled Lord
They now to mortals bring.
Emptied of his majesty,
Of his dazzling glories shorn,
Being's source begins to be,
And God himself is born!

See the eternal Son of God
A mortal Son of man;
Dwelling in an earthly clod,
Whom heaven cannot contain!
Stand amazed, ye heavens, at this!
See the Lord of earth and skies;
Humbled to the dust he is,
And in a manger lies.

We, the sons of men, rejoice,
The Prince of peace proclaim;
With heaven's host lift up our voice,
And shout Immanuel's name:
Knees and hearts to him we bow;
Of our flesh and of our bone,
Jesus is our brother now,
And God is all our own.

Unto You Is Born this Day a Savior—Luke 2:11

By Karl Barth†



... **A** little absentmindedness, a little unbelief and a little Christmas sentiment, these are our reactions (when the Christmas story is read), until the angel of the Lord appears and shakes us up!... You see, if he announces the news, absentmindedness, unbelief and lofty sentiments

are swept away... Let us try to understand what the angel of the Lord told the shepherds and tells us now: *For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior!* These words, “you,” “this day,” “a Savior,” contain the whole Christmas story. We shall meditate on each one of them.

“*To you is born this day a Savior,*” says the angel.... The angel of the Lord was no professor as I am. A professor would perhaps have said, “*To mankind is born a Savior.*” So what? We are apt to deduce that mankind in general does not include me.... In contrast, the angel of the Lord points to the shepherds and points to us. His news is directly addressed to us, “*To you is born this day a Savior.*” *You*, regardless of who you are, whether or not you understand the message, whether or not you are good and pious people. The news is meant for *you*. For your benefit the Christmas story happened. It does not take place without us; we are involved in it....

True, the angel of the Lord points to you and to me, individually, yet he addresses us corporately. His news ties us together like brothers and sisters who share a wonderful present from their father. No one is first, no one is last, no one gets preference, no one gets shortchanged and—most important—not a single one goes wanting....

“*To you... this day,*” says the angel. When Christ was born it was *this day*.... *This day* refers not only to the past, to “once upon a time.” Far from it. The angel of the Lord *today* announces the same news he then announced to the shepherds. We live in the new day which God has made... Because the Savior is born, therefore a new day

† Karl Barth (1886–1968) was one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. Preaching and teaching in the Reformed tradition, he lectured widely in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. He preached this sermon to prisoners.

has dawned!... Who knows whether we shall hear the good news once again tomorrow and shall be free to respond?... “O that *today* you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts!”...

“*To you is born this day a Savior.*” This is the very heart of the Christmas story... What does the word *Savior* convey? The Savior is he who brings us salvation... He is the helper, the liberator, the redeemer... he stands by us, he rescues us, he delivers us from the deadly plague.... The Savior is also he who has wrought salvation free of charge without our deserving and without our assistance, and without our paying the bill. All we are asked to do is to stretch out our hands, to receive the gift and to be thankful....



<http://www.nationallifecenter.com>

This, then, is the Christmas story... What shall we do now? Shall we continue in our old ways, in absentmindedness, in disbelief, perhaps in some lofty Christian sentiments? Or shall we awake and rise, set out on our journey and turn about? The angel of the Lord does not compel anybody. Even less can I compel! A forced listening to the Christmas story, a forced participation in the story, is of no avail. We must willingly listen, and willingly participate.

The Nativity

By C. S. Lewis

Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)
I see a glory in the stable grow
Which, with the ox's dullness might at length
Give me an ox's strength.

Among the asses (stubborn I as they)
I see my Saviour where I looked for hay;
So may my beastlike folly learn at least
The patience of a beast.

Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)
I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;
Oh that my baa-ing nature would win thence
Some woolly innocence!

The True Way of Keeping Christmas—Matthew 1:21

By George Whitefield†



My dear brethren, as the time for keeping this festival is approaching, let us consider our duty in the true observation thereof, of the right way to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my design to lay down rules for the true keeping of Christmas.

First, my brethren, I am to show when your celebration of this festival is not of the right kind.

You do not celebrate aright when you spend most of your time in cards, dice, or gaming of any sort. This is a season for which there is no more allowance for wasting of your precious time in those unlawful entertainments than any other.... Further, they cannot be said truly to celebrate this time, who spend their time in eating and drinking to excess... Finally, nor can they be said to rightly observe the commemoration of the birth of our Redeemer who neglect their worldly callings to follow pleasures and diversions. Alas! Many, instead of keeping this time as it ought to be, run into sin with greediness. You cannot serve God and mammon...

Secondly, I come now to show you, who they are who do rightly observe, and truly celebrate the birth of our Redeemer.

1. Those truly observe this festival, who spend their hours in reading, praying, and religious conversation. What can we do to employ our time to a more noble purpose, than reading of what our dear Redeemer has done

† George Whitefield (1714–1770) was one of the leaders of the 18th century evangelical revival and one of the greatest preachers in the English-speaking world. Few preachers have ever been able to equal his eloquence or his ability to touch the hearts of his listeners. His preaching always had an evangelistic orientation, calling sinners to turn from their evil ways and to put their trust in Christ alone for salvation. This sermon was taken from <http://www.reformed.org>.

and suffered... This is worth employing our time about: and surely, when we read of the sufferings of our Savior, it should excite us to prayer, that we might have an interest in the blood which he spilt upon mount Calvary, and his death and crucifixion, might make an atonement for our sins, that we might be made holy... And let your time be spent in that conversation which is profitable: let it not be about your dress, your plays, your profits, or your worldly concerns, but let it be the wonders of redeeming love...

2. Let the good things of life, you enjoy, be used with moderation... Avoid those great indiscretions, those sinful actions, which will give the enemies of God room to blaspheme... Instead of running into excess, let that

money, which you might expend to pamper your own bodies, be given to feed the poor... Therefore, if any of you have poor friends who are in distress, assist them; and not only those of your acquaintance, but the poor in general.

3. Let me beg of you not to alienate too much of your time from the worldly business of this life, but have a proper regard thereunto, and then you may be said rightly to observe this festival. God allows none to be idle: in all ages business was commended; and therefore do not think that any season will excuse us in our callings...

Finally, let me now conclude, my dear brethren, with a few words of exhortation, beseeching you to

think of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Did Jesus come into the world to save us from death, and shall we spend no part of our time in conversing about our dear Jesus; shall we pay no regard to the birth of him, who came to redeem us from the worst of slavery, from that of sin, and the devil... O be not so ungrateful to him who has been so kind to you! What could the Lord Jesus Christ have done for you more than he has? Then let your time be spent in thinking and talking of the love of Jesus, who was incarnate for us, who was born of a woman, and made under the law, to redeem us from the wrath to come.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:2).



Jesus Birth. <http://www.redecreations.com>

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."

Till, ringing singing, on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men!

Renewal Conference 2015 February 26–28

Featured Speaker:
Rev. Sammy Tippit

Sammy wants the name and fame of Jesus to be known in all the nations of the world. He has been a leading voice among Christians proclaiming God's message of peace around the world during the last few decades. His ministry has taken him to over 80 countries around the globe.



**An Urgent Call
for Revival**

The High Calling—Nov–Dec 2014

The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

The Francis Asbury Society

P.O. Box 7 · Wilmore, KY 40390 · 859-858-4222
FAS@francisasburysociety.com · www.francisasburysociety.com

Managing Editor: Stan Key

Editing/Design/Layout: Jennie Lovell

Contributors: Charles H. Spurgeon, W.E. Sangster, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Max Lucado, Philip Yancey, Karl Barth, C.S. Lewis, John Donne, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Stan Key

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Wilmore, KY 40390
P.O. Box 7

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