About two thousand years ago, a baby was born in Bethlehem, a village near Jerusalem, in Israel, to a woman named Mary. This child, named “Jesus”, was raised in the home of a carpenter in another village called Nazareth. At about the age of thirty, Jesus began His mission, which had been planned by His Father, known to the people of Israel throughout their history as their only God and the Creator of the universe, Jehovah. Jesus came to the Jordan River, and was baptized by John, a man sent from God to prepare the hearts of the people of Israel for the arrival of their promised Messiah. At the moment of His baptism, the Spirit of God descended upon His head in the form of a dove, and the Father proclaimed with His voice that “this is my Son, with Whom I am well pleased.” This inaugurated the work of the Son of God on earth. The Creator God Himself had taken the form of a human being and lived among His creation, to accomplish the purposes of His Father.

The words and actions of Jesus may be discovered by reading the testimony of the writers of the four “gospels” in the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His sojourn here showed us the nature, character, values, and qualities of God. His miracles demonstrated both His infinite power and compassion for the troubled souls He came into contact with. His teachings were (and are) the communications of the Creator of the universe that He sent to each one of us “created in His image”.

Ultimately, His mission was to bring salvation to each one of us. He came to solve the problem of sin that has “separated us from the life of God.” Sin, at its essence, is violation of God’s commands and ways. However, the greater problem of sin is that when we choose to sin, we have denied the sovereign right of God to direct our lives. Another way of putting this is that we have decided that He is no longer the ruler of our lives. The immediate consequence of sin is that our daily lives become dysfunctional. Each of us have been created “in the image of God.” This means that a part of Him lives in each one of us. He knows how we are supposed to function. His word, revealed in the Bible, details to us His “manual” for living. If we live according to the ways He has taught us, we may have “life to the fullest.” However, when we sin, our lives pay the price of failing to live by the rules.

The worst problem of sin is that, since each one of us has sinned and “fallen short of the glory of God”, we have become disqualified from living in His presence, in this life, and the eternal life that will follow our passing from this earth. What makes heaven special is that God lives there. Heaven is His home, and He desires that each one of us come to live with Him there. Heaven also is special because there is no sin there. There is no betrayal, lying, even unkindness, or any of the other sins that cause misery for the inhabitants of this earth. We long to be in the home of God, where He lives, and His ways of love and peace reflect His glory for all of us who live with Him eternally.

Yet, as we mentioned earlier, each one of us has, because of our own sin, disqualified ourselves to live in the sinless presence of God. We have fallen short of His glory. The mission of Jesus is to restore each one of us to the glory that God intended for us. Jesus became our Redeemer, meaning that He “redeemed”, or “bought us back”. For each one of us, our “life with God” was forfeited when we chose to deny His “rule” or “kingship”. Since the cost of sin is so high, the price to “buy us back” from sin was also very steep. When Jesus allowed Himself to be killed on the cross, He offered His sinless life in exchange for each of our sinful lives. Payment for sin was made in full, but Jesus paid the price for each of us. He was qualified to be an acceptable sacrifice for our sins, since He lived a sinless life on this earth. He, in effect, traded His life for each one of ours.

Why must sacrifice be made for sin? In short, that justice may be served. God is a perfect Judge, as well as a perfectly merciful Father. He requires from each of us that we trust His just judgment against those who sin against us, and not take revenge for ourselves. This can be difficult for many of us, since many horrible sins have been committed on this earth! However, God’s word assures us that He will exact the worst punishment for every sin that has ever been committed. Every single sin will be paid for, either by the eternal life of the sinner himself, or by the horrible, tortured death of Jesus on the cross! No sin will be unavenged. However, the perfectly merciful God has also provided a way of escape from the penalty of sin, through His son Jesus.

How may you participate in the gift of eternal life with God through Jesus?

You believe that this Jesus who lived and died two thousand years ago was indeed the Son of God come to earth, who lived and died to fulfill the mission of God to save you from your sins. You acknowledge Him to be your Savior. You confess Jesus as the Son of God with the words of your mouth and the way that you live. But more than just acknowledge Him, you embrace Him fully as the Savior and Lord of your life. The Bible refers to this level of belief in and commitment to Jesus as “faith.” As your Lord, you restore Jesus to the proper role in your life that was displaced by your sin, as the King of your heart. You commit yourself to renounce yourself as the ruler of your life. You “repent”, as you repudiate all sin in your life, and replace that life with a new path of living, a life that follows the example of God Himself in His wonderful ways. You follow this commitment with concrete choices to engage in behavior and activities that reflect the glory of God in your new life. You then participate in the act of baptism, where you are immersed in water, and re-enact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As you are fully immersed in the water, you have buried the old sinner. As you emerge from the water, you are born a new person, resurrected with Jesus, who has been cleansed from sin and is a child of God, returned to the glory that God intended for you.

What next? The new Christian spends his or her life in gratitude and love for God and His wonderful gift. The Christian prays and depends on God for leadership in times of thankfulness, as well as times of crisis. He seeks to join himself to other Christians, to obtain encouragement from others like himself, and to provide encouragement to others like himself (“church”). He seeks to explore God’s word, the Bible, for himself, and to eagerly apply the teachings he discovers there to his life. Following the ways of God reflects the glorious life of God Himself. Following these ways helps keep Satan, the liar and enemy of God who first entrapped us in sin, from having the power to re-take his former follower.

Following the ways of God leads us on the path to heaven, so that at the end of this life we are welcomed by Jesus to the home He has prepared for us, in the presence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father forever.