The Lever That Moves The World
Isaiah 52:10, Psalm 98:1

I take as my text two verses assigned for reading on Christmas Day. The first verse comes from the Prophet Isaiah – Isaiah 52:10 – “The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” The second verse comes from Psalm 98:1 – “O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.”

Let us pray: O God, who hast declared thy love to all by the birth of thy dear Son; help us to welcome him with gladness and to make room for him in our common days, so that we may live with him every day and be received by him into a land of endless day, when all our days on earth are done. Amen.

In the 3rd century before the birth of Jesus Christ, there lived in the seaport city of Syracuse, Sicily, a mathematician by the name of Archimedes. Archimedes was quite probably the greatest mathematician of antiquity and is considered by many to be one of the greatest of all time. If you are a student of mathematics then you know that this claim is no fanciful exaggeration. The list of Archimedes accomplishments is truly impressive. But why am I speaking of Archimedes on the eve of Jesus’ birth?

Well a few days ago, when I was praying for a Christmas message, an Archimedean quote came immediately to mind. It was not the quote “Eureka!” which Archimedes allegedly exclaimed upon discovering a method to measure the volume of an object of irregular shape, though I suppose that would be an appropriate exclamation for Christmas Eve since “Eureka!” means “I have found it!” and we Christians believe that we have found the long awaited Messiah cradled in a manger.

But no, it was not “Eureka!” rather it was another saying of Archimedes that leapt unbidden to my mind. You may never have heard of Archimedes, but you’ve probably heard this quote of his, nonetheless: “Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world.”

Now I must confess that I was more than a bit surprised when those words surfaced in answer to my prayer for a Christmas message. Honestly, I didn’t know the origin of the quote nor had I heard it uttered in many a long year. But the more I thought about it, the more it seemed quite apropos.

A lever, as you know, is a simple machine composed of a fulcrum or pivot point and a long rod. By placing the rod on the fulcrum with the short end under the object you wish to move, you can lift a great weight with very little relative force applied to the long arm of the lever.
How long would the arm of the lever need to be for Archimedes to move the world? Numerous mathematicians have tried to calculate the length and have come to many and various conclusions based on a variety of assumptions but one I read said the lever’s arm would need to reach beyond the limits of the universe. In other words, it would need to reach all the way to heaven or from heaven all the way to earth.

And isn’t that what happened on Christmas Day? On Christmas Day, God reach down from heaven to move the world. In fact, God came down from heaven and was born as a little child. Speaking of Jesus, John’s gospel says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us." (John 1:1, 14) Yes, on Christmas day, the Son of God, who is fully God, became flesh and blood and lived among us.

And so, using the image of Archimedes lever, I would suggest that Bethlehem was the place to stand, the manger was the fulcrum, and the fat, fleshy arms and the chubby cherub hands of Jesus were the arms and hands of God – the arms and hands that moved the lever that moved the world of Jesus’ day.

Think of it. The Emperor Augustus was moved on his mighty throne in Rome to declare a census of his empire so that Mary and Joseph would be moved from their home in Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2. “Bethlehem...from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient of days,” Micah said.

Think of it, a star of unknown origin was moved in its courses to shine above the place of Jesus’ birth and wise men from a distant land were moved to follow that star to the place where Jesus lay. Think of it. On the opposite end of the social spectrum, far removed from the Emperor Augustus, far removed from the wealthy wise men, far removed from polite society, poor shepherds were moved from their flocks in the field to behold and adore the manger child.

Finally, think of how the angels of heaven themselves were so moved by Jesus’ birth that they dropped down from their celestial heights to sing his praise on Christmas day – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14 KJV)

Yes, give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world! Bethlehem was the place to stand, the manger was the fulcrum, and the fat, fleshy arms and the chubby cherub hands of Jesus were the arms and hands of God – the arms and hands that moved the lever that moved the world of Jesus’ day. But as you can see, the world is moving still! Look around you! This place is full. Something has moved you to cluster round the manger once again tonight. What was it? Was it Jesus’ birth? I would suggest that as beautiful as it was, Jesus’ birth isn’t enough in and of itself to move the world today, some two millennia after it occurred.
You see, if all we had was Jesus’ birth then we probably wouldn’t be here. Let’s face it. Many millions were born before him and many billions have been born since – some in circumstances just as humble and some in circumstances alleged to be just as remarkable.

No, it’s not his birth alone that draws us. Something else must move us too. God knew this. So God took his fulcrum and his lever and found another place to stand. He took a stand outside Jerusalem on a hill they called Mount Calvary – Calvary, the place of Jesus’ crucifixion. At Calvary, the fulcrum was the Cross; the crossbeam was the rod; and the bleeding arms and nail pierced hands of Jesus were the very arms and hands of God – the arms and hands that moved the lever that moved the world’s salvation! In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth (have seen) the salvation of our God.”

You see, it was at the Cross that God levered the weight of the world’s sin – your sin, my sin, our sin, all sin – levered it from our shoulders and placed it on his own. It was at the Cross that Jesus died in our place, for our sin, as our substitute, bearing the just penalty for our sin so that we might be acquitted. It was at the Cross that God lifted our sin away from us forever, forgave us, and restored us to a right relationship with himself. It was at the Cross that God bared his holy arm and displayed his salvation – salvation from sin, salvation from judgment, salvation forever in heaven!

But just as Bethlehem was not enough to move the world forever, neither is Calvary. If all we had was Jesus’ death then we probably wouldn’t be here. Let’s face it. Many millions died before him and many billions have died since – some in circumstances just as cruel; some in causes just as noble. No, it’s not his death alone that draws us. Something else must move us too. God knew this. So God took his fulcrum and his lever and found another place to stand.

This time it was the Garden Tomb where Jesus Christ was buried. Finding his fulcrum, God grasped his lever, and rolled the stone away – the stone that sealed the mouth of Jesus’ grave – and raised his Son to life again! The Psalm assigned to Christmas day – Psalm 98:1 – says, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.” You see, death was defeated by the resurrection! Victory was won. Christ was raised as a pledge and promise that God would raise with him, all who belong to him.

Then, forty days after the resurrection, God moved the lever one last time – this time to a mountain in Galilee. On that mountain, God levered Jesus up to heaven where he reigns forevermore. Speaking of Jesus, the Christmas Day New Testament reading says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever!” (Hebrew 1:8) You see, he lived, and died, and rose again so that we who live, and die, might rise again to reign with him forever! Do you belong to him? Then you will reign with him! And it all began at Bethlehem!
In the 3rd century before the birth of Jesus Christ, there lived in the seaport city of Syracuse, Sicily, a mathematician by the name of Archimedes who said, “Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world.” God took a stand at Bethlehem, Calvary, the Garden Tomb, and Galilee; he bared his arm before the nations and all the world has seen his salvation. So let’s “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.”

Are you part of that victory? Have you really been moved? Moved to follow Jesus, not just to a service on Christmas Eve, but moved rather to give him your service to the end of your days? Have you been moved? If you’re moved in life to follow him then you’ll move through death alongside him, and be raised to life to reign with him!

My friend, the Baby Christ of Bethlehem, the Crucified Christ of Calvary, the Risen Christ of the Garden Tomb, the Ascended Christ of Galilee, the Living Christ who’s with you and me wants to move you from earth to heaven. Will you let him? Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world! Forget the world! Let Jesus move you tonight and forever! If you do then you will have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Amen.

Let us pray: Almighty God, you bared your holy arm to show us your salvation through the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of your Son who, bearing our sin and death, rose again to give us life that we might reign with him in heaven. Grant that we may be moved by his Holy Spirit to follow him all our days. Be especially with anyone who is here present due only to habit, custom, convention, or family ties alone. May they surrender tonight to the movement of Jesus’ Spirit and be lifted to a new life of Christian discipleship to follow your Son wheresoever he leads into the coming year and beyond until they finally reign with him in glory! Amen.