

"The Roots of Christianity," by Jeanne Schramm

Many centuries ago in a country to the east of the Mediterranean Sea, a child was born who would one day found a new religion. He had no earthly father, for he was conceived by God and born of a virgin. His birth had been foretold hundreds of years before and a brilliant, divine light glowed in the heavens above the spot where he was born. A local ruler, warned that this child might someday become a threat, attempted to have him slain but he did not succeed. Little is known of the child's youth but there were indications that he was wise beyond his years and that he impressed teachers and philosophers alike with his youthful wisdom. At about the age of 30 he began a public ministry. There are reports he cast out demons, cured the blind and performed numerous unexplained miracles. He was called "shepherd." On several occasions he was tempted by the devil (in the wilderness) but he overcame the temptations.

The message of his ministry was that there was one God—one all-knowing, all-seeing, loving, father-type God who rewards the good and punishes the evil. He taught that death was not the end of life. At the time of death, the good go to heaven to be with God; the evil go to hell to be with the devil.

He taught that at the end of the ages, there will be a general bodily resurrection and a final day of judgment. At this time the impure souls will be thrust into hell for eternal torment. His followers felt that *he* was the key to salvation and this eternal torture could be avoided for those who followed and believed in him.

Of his many teachings, one in particular has withstood the test of time and may be recognized today as a Golden Rule: "Whatsoever you do not approve for yourself, do not approve for anyone else."

Who was this man with a life and a message which sounds so familiar to all of us? His name was Zoroaster and he lived and preached in Persia six centuries before the birth of Christ. By 300 BC, his teachings had spread throughout the Middle East. His teachings had a major influence on the ideas of Judaism and Islam. There are still between 100,000 and 200,000 people following Zoroastrianism in the world today.