

REMINDER

Volume XVI

December 26, 2010

Number 52



The Meaning of Christmas

by Dr. Robert G. Lee (1886–1978)

“The dayspring from on high hath visited us” - Luke 1:78

The birth of a little Child the Christian world at this season celebrates. Christmas Day is a holy and happy day when we commemorate the coming of God’s Son into the world - the incarnation of God by way of the virgin birth. Never too happily can we sing. Never too eagerly can we ring the bells. Never with exaggeration can we express the Christmas benediction: *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).*

With the coming of the “dayspring from on high,” morning broke upon the world’s darkness—in Bethlehem—while men and women, bruised and bleeding, were in a darkness unlighted by flickering philosophical tapers and sputtering Judaistic lamps.

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6). This prediction—most clear in application, most glorious in content, most consolatory in design, most gracious in purpose—points us to the time when God’s Son assumed our nature, entering the world in circumstances of deepest humiliation.

With every detail of the Christmas story we are familiar: Herod of Judah, the last of Judah’s kings; Israel, breathing her hope of Messiah’s advent; Bethlehem, small and white upon its mountain slopes where Heaven put out its brightest star; Cyrenius, publishing the order of the emperor; the star, seen in faraway Persia by wise men of the East who were accustomed to study the heavens and who mounted their camels and journeyed westward over the desert to Jerusalem; the angels; the shepherds; the Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; the gifts from the wise men of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

What is the meaning, we ask, of Christmas to the world?

I. Christ Is A Manifestation

Though Christmas is the celebration of the advent of Christ into the world by human birth, nobody should believe that Christmas marks the beginning of Christ, because the Son who rested on the bosom and fed at the breast of the virgin Mary for a little while had, before this world was, rested on the bosom of the Father - before *“God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4).* Jesus had glory with God before the world was (John 17:5).

Jesus Himself said, *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).*

His incarnation was literally an “enfleshment” - God assumed a living, bodily form. The Child of Mary was of the Holy Ghost. The power of the Highest overshadowed her. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, that body was formed within her—a body that partook of sin of neither man nor woman. And that body was God.

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:16).

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

The apostle Peter speaks of Christ who “hath once suffered for sins” and who was “put to death in the flesh” (I Pet. 3:18). God’s “enfleshment” in Christ means that the preexistent Christ was embodied in human flesh, demonstrated in human life, exemplified in human action, crystallized in human form. That Child Jesus was the Saviour in miniature, in whom, without restriction of essence or suppression of functions, dwelt *“all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).*

Christ was God manifest in the flesh - and His every muscle was a pulley divinely swung; His every nerve, divine handwriting;

His every bone, divine sculpture. Christ who shares that plurality of deity expressed in the story of creation was “made flesh” and “made of a woman.”

II. Christmas Means A Manger

Coldly the world, which later cruelly thrust Jesus out on the point of a spear, received Jesus on a pallet of manger straw. Messiah’s birth chamber was a stable - not a palace, not a human habitation.

What abasement! How wonderful for us that the Lord of Glory was so humbled and abased for us, the vile and sinful progeny of Adam. Thinking of Christ stripping Himself of His robes and roles of glory, Flavel said, *“If the sun had been turned into a wandering atom, if the most glorious angel in heaven had changed into a fly, it had been nothing to the abasement of the Lord of Glory.”*

Born as the very poorest are born, without attendants, He was the One through whom God worked and works sublimities without display.

Listen at the manger! You will hear the voices of Heaven’s singers.

Look upon the manger! You will see the Christ who came down from the heights of deity to the depths of humanity, down from Heaven’s honors to earth’s humiliation, down from Heaven’s coronations to earth’s curses, down from Heaven’s delights to earth’s defamations, down from the glory place to the gory place, down from Heaven’s riches to earth’s poverty.

At the manger, we understand the apostle’s words: *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (II Corinthians 8:9).*

III. Christmas Means A Marking

The lowly birthplace of Jesus was marked by a star.

“When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matthew 2:9 & 10).

That star marking the house to which the wise men from the East came testifies that the fullness of time had come, that the prophecies were accomplished, that He who had a name “as ointment poured forth” had come with a coming that stirred earth and Heaven, the sea and the dry land. For no other child did the heavens assume a new star. For no other child did wise men come from the East “to worship him” (Matt. 2:2). For no other child did angels descend from glory. For no other child did Heaven and earth bear witness - being marked by prophecy and a star.

But I mean something else by the marking. What mean I? I mean that this Christ, coming into the world by virgin womb, small enough to be held in a woman’s two hands and weak enough to feed at a woman’s breast, cradled in a manger, has Christianized the calendar of the world.

This Jesus, whom neither calendars nor clocks nor

contemporary historians took note of, has bent the datelines of all nations around His lowly cradle. Today, as through all the days of all the years the world over, the dates on newspapers printed, the dates on checks drawn, the dates on deeds recorded, the dates on money coined or spent, the dates on cornerstones placed, the dates on monuments erected, the dates on documents filed, the dates on letters written, do testify.

The Greeks tried to date time from their Olympiads.

The Romans tried to date time from the founding of their imperial city.

Justinian tried to date time from the tax levies he made.

Laplace tried to date time from conjunctions of certain planets.

The French Revolutionists tried to date time from the year one of their revolution.

And all failed - miserably, woefully. But what the Jews could not do, what the Greeks could not do, what the Romans could not do, what the French could not do in the matter of dating time, Jesus did gloriously. Before He came, the ages awaited Him. Since He came, the ages rise out of Him.

IV. Christmas Means Music

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Luke 2:20).

As the sun went down in the western sea that day, the stars came out, and the Messiah’s star shone bright. As the temple shepherds watched their flocks by night, in the midst of the starlit silence appeared a glory - and a voice.

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8-11).

The shepherds, filled with awe at the shining presence and the wondrous words, did not speak. Moving not, they gazed. And then suddenly, as they looked, the single messenger became a choir, and the night echoed with divinest music.

“And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:16-18).

As there was music long ago when “upon the midnight clear” came “that glorious song of old,” so still at Christmas there is music.

*Still thro’ the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heav’nly music floats
O’er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lonely plains*

*They bend on hov'ring wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.*

- Edmund H. Sears

Let us listen to the Christmas music, vocal and instrumental, and remember that the Christian life is music in harmony with the will of God. Let us never forget that the centuries become, as it were, a mighty choir lifting their increasing hallelujahs to Christ's name. Higher and even higher rises their sublime refrain.

But, with all the Christmas joy, the Christmas greetings, the Christmas merrymaking, and though many now rejoice because the true Light shineth, for some

V. Christmas Means Mourning

Related tragically are these verses:

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2:3,16-18).

So, though not for the same cause, we find amid the glad ones whom we greet at Christmas, the sad ones. There are those who rejoice. There are those who weep. Some mourn the loss of loved ones.

While some laugh beneath the mistletoe, some grieve beside coffins or over graves.

While some faces are as bright as fires aglow on home hearthstones, some faces are shadowed with intangible gloom.

While some rejoice and are grateful for abounding health, some pine mournfully because of wasted, disease-smitten bodies.

And some have not joy because they have not the righteousness which Christ, as Saviour, first imputes and then imparts.

And some have not joyful peace because they know not the peace which Jesus, who was born to save His people from their sins, makes and then bestows.

Some have not joy because they have not learned in the light of the "dayspring from on high" their sinfulness and have not returned to Him for salvation.

Some find Christmas a time of mourning because they have no calm in their conscience. The heavenly wind has not blown upon them amid life's fretful fevers.

So many miss the joy because they set not their feet in the path of the just, which "*shineth more and more unto the perfect day*" (Prov. 4:18). Yes, Christmas for many means mourning.

VI. Christmas Means Meeting

In the birth of Jesus, Heaven and earth meet. Coleridge,

speaking of philosophy, said: "In wonder all philosophy began, in wonder all philosophy ends, and admiration fills up the interspace." Thinking of Jesus' natal night, of Bethlehem, of the angels, of the inn in which there was no room for the Prince of Glory, of the cattle stall in which He was born, of the fact that He was God held in a woman's arms, of those who "*wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds*" (Luke 2:18), we say, in the words of Shakespeare: "O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful! and yet again wonderful."

Heaven and earth meet. Shepherds served and angels sang. We read of "shepherds abiding in the field," "the angel of the Lord" and "a multitude of the heavenly host." The angels went back to Heaven. The shepherds went to Bethlehem. Heaven and earth were in touch, and Heaven took the initiative. The candle did not reach forth to the sun; the sun stooped to the candle. The glowworm did not reach up to the stars; the star stooped to touch the glowworm. Humanity did not seek God; God sought humanity. "*He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all*" (John 3:31).

He who is from Heaven and is above all is Heaven's Bread for earth's hunger, Heaven's Light for earth's darkness, Heaven's Grace for earth's guilt, Heaven's Life for earth's death.

And during the days of His flesh on earth, this Christ never lifted a finger, never took a step, never breathed a word to injure any. He welcomed to His love the most neglected of the outcast, the poorest of the poor, the saddest of the sad, the vilest of the vile, inviting them to His holy and happy home in Heaven.

But - 'tis sad, 'tis true -

VII. Christmas Means A Marring

I mean by "marring" that men mar the beauty of Christmas by riotous living rather than by reverence of the holy realities which the Christmas season brings to mind. Instead of worship, wickedness; instead of prayer, perversity; instead of devotion, drunkenness; instead of spiritual delight, carnal dancing; instead of expressions of gratitude, utterances of profane and vulgar thoughts; instead of peace, Mars tying crepe to many doorknobs; instead of consecration, carnality and love, by hellish alchemy, changed into lust; instead of hands handling the Bible, hands holding booze bottles; instead of gratitude, greed and grab and get.

As incongruous as chunks of ice for pillows, as rattlesnakes on playgrounds, are many things we see and hear at Christmastime. So many things people do and rejoice in at Christmas season are as man's mean paint on God's fair lilies, as the stupidity of vandals in an art gallery.

Yes, poor understanding have many of the meaning of Christmas. At Christmastime we should remember that "*the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present*

world" (Titus 2:11,12).

Last of all,

VIII. Christmas Means The Master

This Christ whom the disciples called Master is He who, in eternity, rested on the bosom of the Father without a mother, and in time rested on the bosom of a mother without a father—Son of Man and Son of God, just as old as His Heavenly Father and ages older than His earthly mother. He who was in the manger later mastered disease into health, blindness into sight, deafness into hearing, lameness into suppleness and strength of muscles, leprosy into cleanness, storms into calm, scarcity of bread into food plenteous, dumbness into speech, death into life and grace into resurrection glory.

He mastered sin, Satan, suffering, death, the grave and Hell. And through Him we can be more than conquerors, mastering all things that mar proper observance of Christmas, mastering the mind so that it thinks God's thoughts after Him, mastering Satan by resistance until he flees from us, mastering our bodies until we shall be "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (II Cor. 4:10) to the glory of Him who "being in the form of God...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

At this Christmas season, every heart ought to say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15). You did not ask God for this gift; it was freely bestowed.

At this Christmas season, will you receive presents from earthly friends and reject the gift of God? Base ingratitude! You can commit no greater sin than that of rejecting Jesus Christ. Everything you ever did fades into insignificance in the face of your refusal of the gift of God. Confess your utter worthlessness and simply accept the Lord Jesus Christ, God's "unspeakable gift."

At this Christmas season, we may not bring Him as costly a present as the Magi brought, but we can bring to His feet and cradle the frankincense of our joy, the pearls of our tears, the kiss of our love, the prostration of our worship; we can move someone to faith in Him, and give testimony that Jesus, our Saviour, our Lord, is Son of Man without sin, Son of God with power and glory, whose name is ceaseless music at the throne which overlooks the world. ■

AND THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH -

Mrs. Rebecca Pickup ----- Letter
Mrs. Mickie Shatwell ----- Letter



NURSERY MINISTRY WORKERS FOR THIS WEEK

10:50 a.m. Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Rebejah White
Cradle Roll 2: Nathaniel White
6:30 p.m. Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Bertha Segebarrt
Cradle Roll 2: Shirley White
Wed. Evening Service ----- Volunteers Needed!

AND THE PEOPLE CAME...

Week of December 19, 2010

Sunday School ----- 21
Sunday Morning Service ----- 47
Sunday Evening Service ----- 23
Wed. Evening, 12/22/10 Service ----- 25

AND THE PEOPLE GAVE...

Week of December 19, 2010

Undesignated Tithes & Offerings ----- \$ 1,212.21
Insurance Fund ----- \$ 89.00
Insurance Fund ----- \$ 100.00
Tape Ministry ----- \$ 30.00
Total Received for Week of 12/19/10: \$ 1,458.21

Average amount of Undesignated Offerings needed to operate the church EACH WEEK, as a minimum = \$ 1,400.00

INSURANCE FUND REPORT THIS MONTH:

Monthly Requirement ----- \$ 273.08
Amount Received since 12/05/10 ----- \$ 110.04
Amount Still Needed By 01/06/11: \$ 163.04

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

1. Admit that you are a sinner.
2. Admit that God says all sins must be paid for.
3. Accept the fact that Christ took upon Himself the suffering necessary to pay for all your sins.
4. You must change your mind about sin and sinning (God calls this repentance).
5. By an act of your will, accept by faith the Lord Jesus Christ, who can save you from the penalty of sin. Then, tell God about this in a simple prayer. Believe that God keeps His promise to save you, and thank Him for His salvation.