

Has Christmas Lost Its Meaning?

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It is hard for second generations of great movements to keep their founder's principles in proper perspective. That being true of second generations, what of those in the twentieth, or the fiftieth? For almost two millenniums the Christian Church has known of Jesus who came to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). That is no idle tale based on a peasant's dream. It is an amply-attested divine revelation: the very heart of the Gospel; for if He had not come for that very purpose there would be no "good news" for us. Dare we expect to convince our Jewish neighbours and friends that their long-expected and earnestly-desired Messiah has come, unless we prove to them that His Coming has meant to us personally what God declared that it should mean?

These days are packed with "possibilities unlimited." Now is the time for the holiness people to renew their emphasis on the meaning of Christmas. We believe it, but how deeply does it affect us? The mad quest for salvation rocks the world today. They are calling it "security" or "hope" and are seeking it through human schemes, theories, philosophies and organizations; and each new failure is greater than the preceding one, adding to the world's confusion and bringing it to the brink of chaos. Man forgets the lessons of history. In Jesus' day they quested for deliverance from the power of Rome, which was as menacing to them as Communism is to us today; but what they needed was deliverance from the power of Satan. Today, whatever the words it uses, the heart cry of the world is for salvation.

Since Christmas has lost its meaning to modern theology the modern Church has lost its message. While the lost world cries for salvation, these apostles of modern thought offer salvation by character, salvation by the Church, salvation by legalism, or some other human means; and some still seek it through worship of idols, images, and other false gods. We have the message for which the world's heart groans: **salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.** That is the Christmas message: "He shall save His people from their sins." It is real salvation from the guilt, penalty, power and pollution of sin. That meets the cry of the world's heart.

This year may the meaning of Christmas come to us with its clear message: salvation for all men everywhere. That means God's light instead of sin's darkness; God's life instead of sin's death; God's love instead of sin's hate; God's hope instead of sin's despair; God's peace instead of sin's penalty; God's purity instead of sin's pollution; God's certainty instead of sin's chaos; and at the end of life, God's heaven instead of Satan's hell. That is the Christmas message. Let us "girdle the globe with salvation, with holiness unto the Lord."

—Wesleyan Missionary.

The Song and the Star

A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

B. C. Cochrane

"There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!"

It's Christmas time again and once more the world is filled with music and the earth is flooded with light. Once a year Bethlehem is the capital of the world and the birth of a Saviour is head-line news. For a brief, blessed period a spirit of love and brotherly kindness pervades the atmosphere and Christ is given something of the prominence which He deserves. As a consequence, the world is filled with song, soul-thrilling song; peoples of many lands discover in practical experience that "it is more blessed to give than to receive"; personal grudges and national grievances are forgotten for a while and good-will becomes a contagion warming the hearts of men in every country where the birth of the Christ is commemorated.

Unfortunately, the harmony and glory of the Christmas season, so welcome and so wonderful, fades away before December is done. Quickly, so quickly, the world returns to its empty songs and its false hopes. Selfishness and greed regain control of the social, commercial, and political life of the nations, with strife and warfare as the inevitable result.

But the song of Christmas, the wondrous news of the Saviour's birth, is perennial in the heart of the believer. It sings on through January and March, through July and October, filling the life with melody, thrilling the soul with joy and gladness. And the star of Christmas, the heavenly harbinger, guides us still—guides us onward toward that better day which shall dawn with Christ's return to the earth—returns to set up His throne and establish His Kingdom of universal righteousness and peace. And in this hope, this glorious hope, we are comforted and blessed.

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 th' 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."

"HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR, THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE."

The Christ of Christmas

Olgo Marie Norman

Stand with me in Bethlehem this Christmas Eve and view all the wonders of that Holy Night. Think of Christmas and hear the angel choir sing; see the startled shepherds when out of the heavens there burst upon them strains of sweetest music; see swaddling clothes wrapped about a Babe; see a mother and father close by; see a star and wise men of the East; see a house, a young child with his mother and three men worshipping that child. Yes, in Bethlehem, a manger cradled a King: your King, the world's King! But where now is the Christ of Christmas?

At the airport she clung tenaciously to him. One desperate embrace and he was gone. She staggered to the Pontiac, sobbing. She was a stranger to me, but I had noticed how very young he looked in his uniform and felt strangely drawn to her. Quickly I moved toward the car and reassured her mother heart with words of comfort from God's Holy Word. "He's going to Korea," she sobbed; and—then—"Why doesn't God do something about it?"

In a world filled with broken homes and blasted lives; where violence, greed, hate and lust are the dominating passions of hearts which were meant to be swayed by gentleness and love; where wives and mothers are weeping for husbands and sons who are being fed into the jaws of the mad dogs of Communism, this poor woman's cry was just an echo of the heartcry of thousands: "Why doesn't God do something about it?"

Could they only realize it, HE HAS DONE SOMETHING ABOUT IT! Two thousand years ago He did the only thing that could be done. He gave Heaven's greatest gift, THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM. The world stops to admire Him, but that isn't enough. They must follow the Babe from the manger to the cross. Men admire the manger but turn away from the cross. They gaze with tender solicitude on the scene of the Nativity but turn away from a life of sacrifice, the cross that spells suffering, ignominy, agony, death.

Limited? Yes, the Christ of Christmas is limited, unless you and I become messengers. How God shuts Himself up to humanity! And that message of the messenger is limited in its effect, unless it is actually brought to everyone who needs to hear it. The Spirit of the message of the Christ of Christmas BEGINS AT HOME but, thank God, it doesn't stop there. It must reach to THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

"But, I have no call," a preacher's son just told me in my study this week. "Not called," do you say? Listen to General Booth's challenge: "Put your ear down to the Bible and hear Him bid you go pull poor sinners out of the fire of sin. Read, pray, talk, sing, give!"

Stand with me in Bethlehem this Christmas Eve, I say, and as we view all the wonders of that Holy Night, may God inspire us with a new spiritual vision that sends us forth anointed messengers of the Cross.

—Wesleyan Missionary 1951.

We Wish All Our Readers A Joyous Christmas