

## ★ ★ A Christian Christmas ★ ★

In one of our large cities not long ago, the Christmas season officially opened with a Thanksgiving parade sponsored by one of the stores. The alleged purpose of the parade was to welcome Santa Claus to the city and to introduce the spirit of giving and the mirth of the season.

Outwardly, Santa Claus is the most prominent feature of the Christmas time. The children of our generation are far more Santa Claus-conscious than God-conscious—the true Giver. "What do you think of first when you think of Christmas?" a pastor asked the children of his Sunday school. Like an avalanche came the boisterous reply, "Santa Claus!"

In the name of Santa Claus we give and receive gifts in competitive expense and even become submerged in useless absurdities and interpretations. For instance, in a certain western city, Christmas "Mickey Mouse" posters were plastered up and down the main street.

Today there is a growing sentiment against false interpretations of Christmas and the negligence of our so-called Christian nation concerning the central fact of Christmas. There is a noticeable and wistful longing in the hearts of many people to establish in the minds and hearts of young and old the importance of making Christmas Christian.

It is time, especially in these days of confusion and search for truth, that we strive to give the Christmas season an honorable and true interpretation.

Just how may we observe a Christian Christmas? We may find the true answer by going back to that Christmas of long ago.

All was quiet on the hills of Judea just outside the little town of Bethlehem. Shepherds, watching their flocks by night, talked softly among themselves. The sacred name of One who, they hoped, would come soon and redeem Israel from Roman bondage was upon their lips. The Messiah! Oh, that He might come!

Hardly had their conversation ceased when, lo, in the sky, an angel appeared saying, "Fear not...for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And suddenly a multitude of angels appeared saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The shepherds, overjoyed at the annunciation, cried, "Let us go, even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass." Hastening to the town, they found the Babe in a lowly manger. And returning to their flocks, they glorified and praised God for what they had seen and heard. Jesus the Saviour had come!

Jesus the Saviour had been born! That was Christmas! Today Christmas cannot be considered apart from the birth of Jesus. Christmas without Christ at the center is not Christmas at all.

It is easy to see the glory of the Easter time, with its attending beauty of nature aglow, its promise of eternal life. But the birth of a child in a humble manger is not so appealing.

Unless we kneel at the manger and greet the divine Lord, unless we recognize that God came to earth in the person of the Child to save us from sin and give eternal life, we have no Christian Christmas. We have only outward sham—the relics of an outworn custom of giving presents, many of them useless.

Thousands of persons turned out on a cold Christmas night in Allentown, Pennsylvania, to put Christ back into Christmas. The spiritual meaning of the holiday was beautifully expressed in an hour-long parade. Fifty-six floats depicted religious themes. No commercialism was permitted. Even Santa Claus was ruled out. How meaning-

ful Christmas must have been to the multitude who saw that parade!

How many we observe a Christian Christmas? When the shepherds "had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." What an opportunity we have to present Christ at Christmas! We can present Him by telling the good news, by spreading the meaning of His birth with its message of good will and peace, by demonstrating these meanings in our lives!

Christmas is the time when we can show what an immense difference Jesus' birth has made in human affairs. Too, it is an appropriate time to straighten out any kinks and tangled threads in our lives. If harsh, unkind words have been spoken, if coldness has come between loved ones and friends, let us seek forgiveness. Let coldness melt before the glowing fires of Christian love and understanding.

Christmas should be the most favorable time of the year for repeating the story of Christ's birth to the children. What a home festival Christmas may be! The Christmas story may be told or acted out, perhaps about the Christmas tree.

Thousands of boys and girls in our fair land have never been told the sweet, old story of the first Christmas. All they know about is Santa Claus.

One Christmas season a little child stood with her mother in front of a store window showing the Nativity scene. "Who is the baby in the funny little bed?" the child asked curiously. "Jesus," the mother replied indifferently. "Jesus! Who is He?" the child asked. No doubt the youngster knew the name of every toy in every store window in town, but she did not know the name Jesus.

It is time that we escaped from the sentimental and damaging interpretations of the Christmas season and got back to putting Christ into Christmas.

How may we observe a Christian Christmas? We may honor the birth of the Christ child as did the Wise Men that first Christmas—in offering gifts in the spirit of worship. They, as did the shepherds, found the Child with His mother Mary in Bethlehem. Falling down upon their faces, they acknowledged Him as King—a King with a spiritual kingdom, which Jesus many years afterward claimed is not of this world, and Paul designated as a kingdom of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Christ's followers have found it such down through the ages.

In those early days, whenever kings of the East were visited by their subjects, they were given precious gifts. Jesus is our King, and we cannot have a Christian Christmas without presenting to Him on His birthday our precious gifts to love, money, devotion, and loyalty.

Christmas is the one great time of the year when our giving should be at its best—sacrificial, spiritual, useful.

A school teacher asked her class of children, "Why do we observe Christmas?" From a six-year-old came the swift answer. "Because it is Jesus' birthday." Yes, a Christian Christmas is a Christmas that celebrates Christ's birthday in memory of Him. It is a Christmas that honors Him for what He has given the world—love, light, immortality, peace, the way to live, the Word of God, the church, and all the good things of life.

A Christian Christmas goes deeper than merriment and mirth. It goes beyond celebrations with tinsel trees and colored lights, the exchange of gifts, elaborate dinners. It even goes beyond listening to needful sermons from our pulpits. All these are good in themselves, but they cannot make our Christmas Christian. To have a

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