

# The Contrasts of Christmas

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Christmas is full of contrasts. Some are right on the surface: the glory of the angels' song and the humility of swaddling clothes in the straw of a stable; the lowly shepherds and the wealthy Magi; the greatest event in history almost unnoticed at the time; a King among the cattle instead of in a castle.

Other contrasts of Christmas lie deeper. They belong to the very nature of what happened in Bethlehem. They make it the event which divides the age into "Before" and "After." Nothing was or ever could be the same after God invaded history, and the Word, who was with God and was God, became "flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14).

I  
Consider, for example, that Christ became the Son of Man that we might become the sons of God. He came unto His own and was not received. But "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

God's redeeming message to man could not be in spoken or written word, but in the living Word. It could not be told; it must be shown. More than what Jesus said, the transforming power of the gospel lies in what He was and what He did. Only an incarnation—God become man—could reconcile rebellious men to God.

II  
Another contrast of Christmas lies in the fact that Christ became poor that we might be rich. Of this Paul reminds us when he says, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

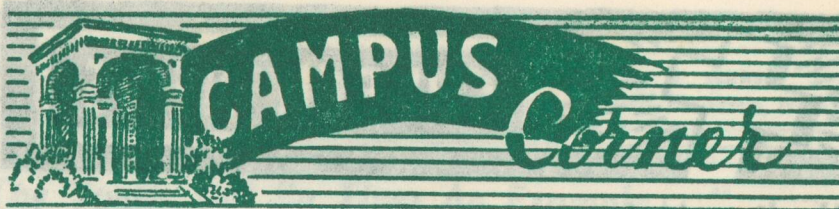
At every step through His life we see this contrast. He was so poor He owned no home in which to lay His head, and this was in order that He might bring us to mansions in heaven. His own food was the simple fare of a Galilean peasant, yet He spread a table for five thousand at once. His most valuable item of clothing was only a seamless robe over which the soldiers rolled their dice, yet He has clad multiplied thousands in the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints.

III  
Another contrast of Christmas is the contrast of joy and sorrow reflected in the second chapter of Luke. There we read the message of the angel: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (v. 10). Yet in the same chapter we find the words addressed to the virgin mother, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (v. 35).

The shadow of the Cross lay over the manger. When the wise men from the East came bringing gifts, they presented not only gold, the gift to royalty; and frankincense, used in the worship of Deity—they also brought myrrh, for the embalming of the dead.

IV  
Still another contrast of Christmas is the deeper thought of Paul in II Corinthians 5:21 "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The spotless Lamb of God became our Sin Offering, taking away the sin of the world by taking it on himself and bearing it away (John 1:29, marg.).

In Him, life comes out of death, righteousness out of His sin offering. We would never have forgiveness had not our Substitute offered himself without spot to God, taking upon himself the consequences of our sin. It was



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By the time The Highway reaches you, many will have received a Christmas leaflet from Bethany. We trust that the messages will bring inspiration to you and at the same time tighten your ties to Bethany Bible College. The annual receipts from Christmas offerings supplement inadequate church budgets and enable us to maintain our program.

Unfortunately, some of you will not receive leaflets due to the incompleteness of our mailing list. If any of you wish to be added to our list, please notify us by post-card.

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for this end that the first Christmas dawned.

V  
A final poignant contrast of Christmas is the contrast between the many who know and the few who understand. Many were informed of the strange events at Bethlehem, but only a few—a Mary, a Joseph, an Anna, a Simeon—pondered these things in their hearts.

Never has this contrast been more sharp than in our day. The long overdue effort to "put Christ back into Christmas" is commendable, but not very successful. Everywhere there is information about the facts of Christmas, but so rarely any indication of understanding what it's all about. We have given Easter to the bunnies and the parades, and have surrendered Christmas to Santa Claus and office parties.

This is judgment on our generation as it was on His. There is still no room for Him in the inn. He still comes to His own—and His own still receive Him not. "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Christmas means giving. There is no doubt about what God gave; and there is no doubt about the gift He wants from us—not what we have, but what we are, ourselves. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord" ((II Corinthians 8:5).

'Twas not enough that Christ was born  
Beneath that star that shone,  
And earth was set that glory morn  
Within a golden zone.  
He must be born within our hearts  
Before He finds His throne.

Large asking and large expectation on our part honour  
God  
—A. L. Stone