

From Bethlehem to Golgotha

When Charles Dickens was a boy authorities at that time were convinced that the Christmas carol would be extinct within a few years. Yet the carol lives on among people of many nations.

Again during this season everyone joins in the singing of the traditional hymns. Many who do not darken the door of a church from one Sunday to the next will attend a Christmas service.

Of course, we have not forgotten the annual ritual of sending Christmas cards. We have contributed to the fast-burgeoning greeting card industry. In the U.S. alone, 2,248,000 Christmas cards are sold annually. This card sending ritual helps individuals to keep up with their acquaintanceships and strengthens friendships. Receiving cards from all over reminds us of the many people we know and does bring back many pleasant memories.

Christmas is the season of good will towards man, the traditional toasts to peace sparkled with optimism. Perhaps I am prejudiced about this. But many times I find the seasonal meditations on "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" less than Biblical.

Many will seek to evoke the spirit of Christ. If only men would follow the example of the Christ born in the humble man manger in Bethlehem, there would be no more war and the injustices of poverty and riches in industry and underdeveloped countries would be abolished. If men would only follow Him! But you don't hear in these words the thought that Christ is our judgment as well as our hope!

I believe in the Christmas story as recorded in the Scriptures. The central message asserted here is the miracle of the Incarnation. God became man. Christ the Son of God came to earth. He was born of the Virgin Mary.

His first bed was a manger in a stable. Angels announced the Lord's birth not to the learned theologians and scribes in Jerusalem but to some poor shepherds who were watching their sheep that night of nights.

What a simple, yet so mysterious story. Every detail of the Biblical record is suggestive of the mystery of life and the majesty of the divine which transcends human life.

There is nothing sweet or sentimental about the fact that God became man. As a matter of fact, the first Christmas destroyed the illusion that men are basically good and are becoming morally better in the process of time.

Christ's birth shattered the dreams of all who believe that they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and usher in the kingdom of God with an idealism based on man's belief in himself.

Christ's coming made null and void any hope of making a success of man's self-improvement program. According to Scripture the Incarnation was occasioned by mankind's fall into sin. Christmas? Christ came down with the purpose to bring up again the whole ruined world.

The Jesus who was born a baby in Bethlehem travelled to Golgotha. At the foot of the Cross, we see God's purpose for sending His Son to earth. And when we look at the Cross we become conscious of our sin and the tragedy of unrealized ideals. Our culture knows more about the manger than about the cross. But we can never understand what happened in Bethlehem if we have not seen Christ's crucifixion. You cannot sing Isaac Watts' "Joy to the world! the Lord is come" if you are not acquainted with the truth of Johann Sebastian Bach's "O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down."

At this Christmas season I urge you to consider the fact that Christ is God's answer to mankind's desperate need. The gospel in a nutshell is "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When you believe the Christ of the Scriptures, you'll have a joyous and blessed Christmas!

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