

Many today are struggling to keep the real meaning of Christmas in the forefront of their minds. Many people worship regularly and that probably a ^{of their desire to keep Christmas,} sign. We don't want to be like the little girl who was on Santa Claus's lap. She give him a long list of expensive things which she wanted for Christmas and then without a word of appreciation she jumped off his lap and started toward her mother. Her concerned mother spoke quickly, "Honey, haven't you forgotten something?" The little girl thought for a moment then said to Santa Clause "Charge it".

The meaning of Christmas has to do with heavenly signs and angels' songs. It has to do with startled shepherds and kneeling wise men. It has to do with a world alive with messages of divine perpose and promise.

"Sing unto the Lord, for he hath done excellent things" writes Isaiah. "Sing, of daughter of Zion; shout for joy, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away his judgements" sings Zephaniah.

Christmas is the celebration of God's intervention in human affairs. That is the place to begin if we are to understand its meaning. It celebrates what God has done.

The Jewish scholar, Montefiروه, has shown that, when compare to Judaism, there is only one teaching we find in Jesus but do not find in Jewish teachings before him. That is the teaching that

God is like a shepherd who goes out to look for the lost sheep. Jesus always believed that God was a God of love and forgiveness and, that, if a sinner repented, God would freely forgive him. But Jesus taught that God would not wait for the sinner to repent. He would go ^{out} ~~and~~ and seek the sinner to call him back.

Christmas is the celebration of that time...those times.. when God reached out thru the baby in a manger. "God ~~so~~ loved the world....."

In our day we have been impressed with man's accomplishments - landing on the moon,, transplants of human organs, the amazing strides in communication - that we forget how much those events pale in comparison to the significance of that time when the God of all that lives, ^moves, and has its being, emptied himself and became a tiny infant.

We are like the rich man who was proud of his beautiful lawn "I had those trees moved right here to my lawn!" he boasted, "had them set in perfect geometric fashion this way". To which the pasotr murmured, " My, My, it just goes to show you what wonders God could perform if only he had money".

Before man begin his wandering on the earth and his ^{spoiling} ~~pointing~~ of it, the stars were already shining their lights of beauty, the oceans were already filled with teeming life, and God was already working out his purpose and plan for creation.

Christmas is the celebration of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Before the season is past, I hope you will recall those

things God has done in your life. Whether or not you share those intimate moments with others or not, it is important for you to remember them.

Blaise Pascal had a remarkable spiritual experience in his room one night. He called it FIRE IN THE NIGHT and wrote about it. Then he sewed the written account into the lining of his coat. All the rest of his life he could feel and touch the crinkle of paper, but he never showed it to anyone. It was discovered after his death. Pascal understood that sometimes there are things which God gives us that are too intimate to share with anyone. They are part of us and our past and must be claimed and enjoyed as ~~something~~^{something} God has ~~used~~^{used} to bring us to this point.

Christmas is a celebration of what God has done. It is also a celebration of what he will yet do. Paul does not say anything in his writings about the birth of Jesus, but he has a good deal to say about when Christ shall return. In Phillipians he writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Let your moderation be known to men. The Lord is at hand"

In 1916 the man whose invention led to the development of TV said: "...commercially and financially I consider television an impossibility, a development of which we need spend little time dreaming".

In 1949 a respected science magazine said: "Landing and moving around the moon offers no more serious

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moving about the moon offers so many serious problems for human beings, that it may take another 200 years for science to lick them".

Some predictions in 1970 said: Inflation will level off and average about 2%; two homes per family will become the norm. But in 1980 they predicted: Double digit inflation will continue. A man's tie will cost \$48 by 1990, a McDonald's hamburger will cost \$5 and a small color TV will cost \$2000.

Who knows what the future will hold. Nobody knows..We only know who holds the future, and that is God. We need not fear the future. JCPenney
the ~~fact~~ woke one morning to find that he was broke. It seemed to him life was at an end. His wife had died. He owed 7 million. He was a prisoner in a sanatorium in Battle Creek Michigan. Penney wrote farewell notes and tried to take his own life but failed. Round the clock nurses were assigned to him. One day as his loneliness closed in on him more and more, he walked down the hospital ~~corridor~~ ^{corridor} and heard singing coming from the chapel!

All you may need he will provide
God will take care of you

No matter what may be the test,
God will take care of you.

Then he heard the text being read "Come to ^{me} all who labor and a heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

Suddenly
~~Suddenly~~ Penney was set free, and his life began anew.

That is the message we want to hear concerning the future: "No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you".

Christmas is a celebration of what God has done, it is a celebration of what he will yet do. But it is also a celebration of God's presence here and now. "They shall call his name Emmanuel - God with us". Those who experience Christmas this year are the ones who will experience the rebirth of Christ in their hearts.

Carl Michalson, a brilliant young theologian, died in a plane accident several years ago. He was fond of telling stories that ~~explain~~^{explain} the difference the eyes of faith make. He wrote:

I once over heard a British entertainer telling about her experiences toward the end of WW II. She was going from bedside to bedside in a Navy hospital. She came to one sailor who had lost both his eyes. She said to him: 'is there anything I can do for you?' He replied, 'Can you ~~sing~~^{sing}?' She said "Not every well but what would you like?" He said "Smiling ^{through}" She began singing and when she came to the lines 'those two eyes of blue come smiling thru' he stopped her and said: 'tell me, what shall I say to them when they ask me the color of my eyes? Shall I say they were blue or shall I say they are blue?' And she said, "You must tell them that they were blue!" "O well", he said, "It doesn't matter. I have become a Christian and intend to be ^a minister and you do not need eyes to see God".

And Michalson write: "That is just it. Nobody needs eyes

to see God, no eyes, but the eyes of faith. And what are the eyes of faith? The eyes of faith are the eyes that discern Jesus of Nazareth, the one in whom God chose to make himself present to us in our history and for our salvation."

How can we help but sing? No wonder the people were in great expectation, as Luke tells us, as they heard John the Baptist preach. God was ready to do something great in their lives.

God is seeking to do something great in your life. Open yourself to Christmas. Open your ~~self~~ heart to the birth of Christ within.