



“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill towards men”
(Luke 12:14)

“Margaret ... saw issuing from a manger at Bethlehem this torrent of coins and toys ... How many of these vacillating shoppers and tired shop-assistants realized that it was a divine event that drew them together? ... ‘No, I do like Christmas on the whole,’ she announced. ‘in its clumsy way, it does approach Peace and Goodwill. But oh, it is clumsier every year”

- EM Forster *‘Howards End’*”

What does Christmas mean to you? EM Forster was a prominent humanist, so you may choose to discount him, but I was struck by his character’s comments on Christmas shopping. And published in 1910 at that! I was brought up in the UK with its traditions of trees and cards and decorations and carols and dinners and presents and family get-togethers. All have their place, I do believe. Now I live in Zimbabwe, I find it very different, not least because the weather makes so much of the European tradition silly or irrelevant, even when people try to practice it.

Perhaps for that reason I don’t miss the traditions I used to love and maybe, just maybe, it helps me remember the ‘divine event’ that Christmas truly is. Church and Christian celebration were indeed vital parts of my family’s

Christmas celebration and I do pray that all of us reading this will make that focus.

I do believe that God is happy for us to have a good time. Beautifully decorated trees, houses, cities, a special family meal, the giving and receiving of presents etc are welcome and positive but let us not be guilty of celebrating Christmas in a ‘clumsy’ way. Let us as Christians do our best to highlight the Peace and Goodwill that God brought to earth on that first Christmas.

I also read this morning the passage from Isaiah, that the virgin will give birth to a son and that he will be called Immanuel. God with us is an amazing thought. It is not just for Christmas but for our whole lives but I pray that God may be with each one of us in a special way this Christmas.

Glory

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father. (John 1:14)

If you have been a Christian for a number of years and are very familiar with much of the Bible, it is so easy to read a passage and miss the amazing things that it contains. Take this verse and the statement “We have seen his glory”. What an amazing claim John is making!

The basic truth of the Christmas story is God becoming man in the form of a baby. John, in his gospel, does not tell the story of the first Christmas but reflects on its significance: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” – another monumental claim. Of course there is a sense in which John has seen Jesus (literally) and we have not. But remember too the special promise of Jesus in what he said to Thomas: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Tim Chester* suggests that as we read the Bible with an attitude of seeing the glory of Jesus in each passage, incident or story. “Think how what you’re reading reveals the character of Jesus or how it reveals the work of Jesus. Imagine that the passage is placing Jesus on a stand for you to admire. What do you see? What is it that’s admirable? How does Jesus reveal the glory of God?”

*The one true light, Tim Chester, The Good Book Company, 2015

Stuart Weir www.veritesport.org

Wood

One day I realised what a great part Wood played in the story of the Nativity and in its symbolism. Traditional paintings of Mary and Joseph making their journey to Bethlehem from Nazareth show Mary seated on a donkey. Joseph, holding a length of rope, is shown leading the animal and there is a sturdy staff in his right hand. He knew just how precious was the burden the donkey carried. The stout length of wood not only assisted as he walked this long road, but it could be used to fend off wild animals or dogs that would cause the donkey to panic. Joseph, of course, was a man who cut, and planed, and smoothed, and chiseled, and carved wood. And it was to Mary and this carpenter, this humble worker of wood, that God entrusted the early years of His Son.

The couple reached Bethlehem at last. Tired and exhausted, they sought out an inn. Bethlehem was crowded with so many families visiting the town to register for the census. So when Joseph rapped on the door – the wooden door – of the inn, it remained firmly closed to the couple and to the unborn Son of God. In one sense, things have not changed in over 2,000 years. Hearts’ doors, as solid as wood, have been kept firmly locked and bolted to God, His Son and the Gospel from generation to generation. Yet Jesus still says, ‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.’ (Revelation 3:20)

It seems the innkeeper did, at least, have compassion on the couple and offered a stable. And there Mary 'brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.' Christ's cradle was a manger; a rough-hewn, uncomfortable, dirty feeding trough of unworked timber. If you want Jesus Christ to live within you, you cannot offer him some neglected part of your life; he deserves no less than the very best your heart has to offer.

In fields near Bethlehem shepherds were with their flocks, and to them an angel brought the miraculous news that 'a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.' Sent by the angel to the manger, they rushed off – clutching, no doubt, their crooks. These wooden artifacts were their tools of trade. They kept errant sheep and lambs in order and were their protection from predators. Having found the Christ, they knelt and worshipped and then returned glorifying and praising God. Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd', and the Shepherd's crook has long been the symbol of the Church's great responsibility, and therefore every Christian's responsibility, to care for its flock.

A staff, a door, a manger, a crook; what a wondrous story is theirs to tell!

Colin Baker
From The Bell, Christchurch, Borrowdale

The Greatest Gift Ever

"Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin."

Romans 3:24-25 (The Message)

The greatest gift you've ever been given wasn't bought in a store. No cash exchanged hands. It wasn't even wrapped.

Yet it cost the Giver everything.

The Bible says God sent his Son to Earth to give you the greatest gift ever. He came to Earth to die—so that you could be made right with God. Romans 3:24-25 says, *“Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin”* (The Message).

So why did Jesus have to die? Let’s go back to the basics of people’s problem and God’s solution.

- **Nobody’s perfect.** I’ve never met a single person who has claimed to be perfect. I don’t measure up to my own expectations, much less God’s perfect standard. Neither do you. We’ve all blown it. The Bible says, *“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory”* (Romans 3:23 CEV).
- **God is just.** God wants to be fair. When somebody breaks a law, there must be a penalty for it. When you break humanity’s laws, you pay humanity’s penalty. When you break God’s laws, you pay God’s penalty. The Bible says, *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23 NIV).
- **Jesus paid the price for your sin.** The Bible says, *“God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God’s goodness into us!”* (2 Corinthians 5:21 TLB). Jesus took on my sin and your sin and all the sin that has ever been committed. That’s the Good News, the Gospel. Jesus paid the price you could never pay.
- **You must decide whether to accept God’s free gift.** God gave you a free gift of salvation when Jesus took your sin upon himself. But it’s a gift you must receive. The Bible says, *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12 NIV).

Will you accept God's gift of salvation? It's one thing to understand the basics of how to have a relationship with Jesus. It's another to accept the gift.

If you're ready to make the important decision to accept God's gift of salvation today, then pray this prayer:

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is your Son. I believe that he died for my sin and that you raised him to life. Jesus, I want to trust you as my Savior and follow you as Lord from this day forward. I accept your free gift of salvation. Guide my life and help me to do your will. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Rick Warren www.purposedriven.com

"The great challenge left to us is to cut through all the glitz and glam of the season that has grown increasingly secular and commercial, and be reminded of the beauty of the One who is Christmas." – Bill Crowder

Knee Polishing

What can we pray for this Christmas? Let us pray for peace and goodwill, that the world will know that God is indeed with us.

Sunday : pray for the Christmas message in our churches, encouragement for ourselves and good news for those who may not attend regularly

Monday : pray that the commercial side of Christmas may not swamp the Christian celebration

Tuesday : pray for peace and goodwill in the land where Jesus was born

Wednesday : pray for those who may be lonely and alone this Christmas, that they will come to realise that God is with them

Thursday : pray that we may all accept God's greatest gift in our lives

Friday : little things can be a big inspiration. Pray that encounters with wood in our daily lives may remind us of God

Saturday : pray that familiarity with the Christmas story may never prevent us feeling true awe for all that it represents

Cryptic Christmas Card

A man sent his friend a cryptic Christmas card. It said: A B C D E F G H I JK MN O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. The recipient puzzled over it for weeks, finally gave up and wrote asking for an explanation. In July he received the explanation on a postcard: "No L."

No Room In The Inn?

A boy wanted to be Joseph in the Sunday School pageant. He was cast as the landlord and objected loudly, but to no avail. When the pageant was presented, Mary and Joseph knocked on the door and asked him if he had a room for them. The boy smiled and said, "Yes, sure. Lots of room. Come on in!"

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