

RELIGION

Jesus is the Ultimate Gift

BY ETHEL BATES

The Christian community; those in ex-halted positions in the government, talk show hosts, in particular, and secular society in general have focused on searching for truths, long held beliefs, in relation to historical and Biblical events.

It was within this context that I began to ponder the authenticity of the message that is in the Christmas song about the Three Kings of Orient:

"We three kings of Orient are bearing gifts, we've traversed so far, hills and fountain, moors and mountains, following yonder star."

Who were these men? My Life Application Bible uses two terms in relation to these three Kings: "Students of the stars" and "wise men." But these wise men did not understand the essence of the babe who was born in a stable, whose manger was a cradle that was hewn out of a rock. They did not know that he was the ultimate



"I have come, that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."

— John 10:10

gift of life, and he come humbly, so he would be accessible to all mankind.

They did not know that this little bitty babe was the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, who had come into this tired, sin sick world to set the captive free. He came with the gift of salvation; the gift of redemption, of forgiveness.

Although these three wise men came bearing gifts for the Christ child, there seems to have been a spirit of complaining, as they sang about traversing over the hills and mountains. It sounds like they were tired! I don't know

about you, but they sounded a little like some of us, when we think we are doing something for God. Had they known who Jesus was, they would have come running over the hills and mountains, shouting Joy To The World, The Lord Is Come, Let Us Receive Our King!

Christmas is about receiving. Receiving the King. Receiving the gift of life that Our Lord offers us, not only during the Christmas season, but throughout the year.

"I have come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

He not only offers abundant life, He gave his life at the cross for you and me. This Christmas, as you forge your way through the tangled ribbons and mounds of wrapping paper, while the "jingle bells" song jangles your nerves, remember that Jesus came offering rest for your soul.

I don't know what gifts the wise men brought to Jesus, but I know from personal experience that whatever they were, they paled in comparison to what Jesus offers to the world today.

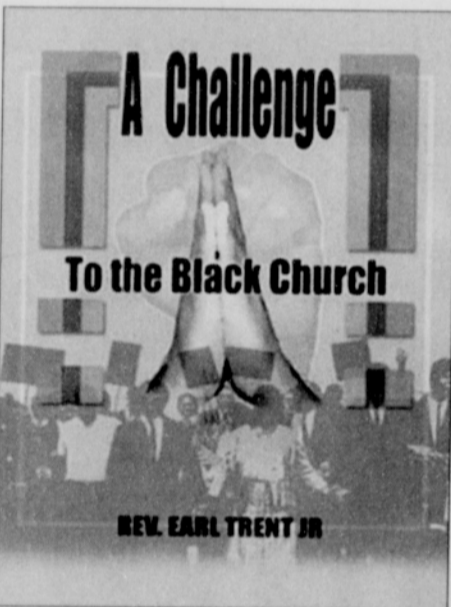
As this year comes to an end, don't refuse the gift that Jesus has for you. Enjoy the Christmas season, but keep the truth in perspective. Jesus is the ultimate gift. Will you enter into the New Year with the gift of Jesus in your heart?

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Ethel Bates is a minister at Allen Temple AME Church in northeast Portland. Her e-mail address is ethelbaily2@aol.com.

Penetrating the Black Church

Insightful analysis from the inside



Rev. Dr. Earl D. Trent Jr. and his book "A Challenge to the Black Church" (left), which confronts the standards and beliefs of the modern black church.

Nearly everyone has an opinion about the black church, its role, shortcomings, present state, and what it should be doing for the future of the black community. Far too many of these opinions are from the outside looking in, based on a childhood remembrance, or a very cursory knowledge of the church.

As a pastor for more than 20 years, Rev. Earl D. Trent Jr. has written, "A Challenge to the Black Church," a collection of essays to the black church, not about it. In doing so he introduces a new direction in black religious writings.

Part social critique, part biblical interpretation, these essays present a look at the Gospel that demands thoughtful re-

sponse.

His contention is that justice and not soul saving in its popular sense, is the central concern of Jesus and the standard by which the church will be judged. Therefore with biblical justification, the black church is challenged to reexamine its purpose and mission in light of the critical social, economic, emotional and spiritual needs of black people in the 21st century.

This book is a must read for those black Christians who are dissatisfied with the status quo, the state of black people and unafraid to face the challenge of the Gospel. The book is available at www.amazon.com for \$14.95.

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