

At the Heart of Christmas

"View from the Cave"

In ancient Greece, the great and ethereal philosopher Plato once envisioned people as chained in an underground cave where they see only the shadows of objects cast upon the cave walls. In this situation, he said people would readily conclude that the shadows of things constituted reality. What if these chained people could escape, he asked, and see things as they are? Plato's famous vision is called his "view of the cave."

Christmas provides us with another view from a cave, the cave of Bethlehem, in which people and the world are seen for the first time in an entirely new light, the light which we call the "Sun of Justice," Jesus, the Light of the World. It is true, the Christ-event tells us, that our vision as human beings is clouded by the cave-like confines of this earthly existence. Through Christ we can free ourselves from the chains that bind us (ignorance, superstition bigotry, etc.) and acquire a sound glimpse of reality and its meaning. But only when we can see being as a reflection of God, the Infinite Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, can we perceive creation as it actually is.

Christmas means the coming of Eternal Light into human history. The shepherds were in darkness that first Christmas night. The Shepherds symbolize most of us: good ordinary people; responsible, hardworking, serious minded people looking for answers, searching for light in the gray corridors of life. It is Christ, God-made-man, Emmanuel, who enters the cave of our life, and enables us to see all reality in His Light. The "view from the cave" that Bethlehem gives us is a view of heaven and earth, of God's living among us, of insuperable light in the midst of darkness, of liberation from human chains.

"The Glory of the Lord shone around them. They were very much afraid, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you new of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.'" - Luke 2:9-11.

Father Brian J. Mc Govern - St. Patrick's Church, Heppner



Now the birth of Jesus Christ is on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

When Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of the shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard of the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod they departed into their own country another way.

St. Matthew 1:18-2:12

Taking Christ out of Christmas

We have taken the Christ out of Christmas
We have put an "X" in His place
We have commercialized His birthday
Till it nearly hides his face.

We have left Christ out of the picture
In most of the things that we do.
Till Christmas is just a big Holiday
Now what does it mean to you.

I think I see God in the heaven
As he looked down on the sinful men
Saying, what can I do to redeem them
And then he wrote out the plan.

If I had someone to send
To that sinful world below
To redeem man from his awful plight
But who could I get to go.

And then His heart was saddened
And His eyes were filled with tears
I just could not ask anybody to go
But I will call for volunteers

So he gathered the angels around the throne
Told of the plight that man was in
Who would go down to earth below
And redeem man from his sin.

Who would leave their beautiful home
And go down to earth below
And redeem man from his awful plight
My Jesus said, I will go.

But man will reject you, he'll spit in your face
You will have no resting place for your head
An outcast, a stranger on earth will you be
But I'll go, my redeemer yet said.

Would you be willing to suffer all this
For failing man below
And finely die on the cruel cross for their sin
My Jesus still said, I will go.

So my Jesus came from heaven
On a cold December day
Born in a cold cattle stable
And in a manger lay.

The angels sang his welcome
From heaven up on high
The shepherds on the hillsides
Heard the music in the sky.

Yes, my Jesus came from heaven
He left all that glory above
To die on the cruel cross for my sin
Such wonderful matchless love.

I think that it must grieve our Lord
The way some of his children do
The way they act you would not know
They new what day it was.

Let us put Christ back into Christmas
In all that we do and say
For after all let us remember
It is our Lords Birthday.

This Christmas poem written by John L. Wilks, late grandfather of Rev. Floyd Wilks - Pastor of Heppner Church of the Nazarene.

Experience Christmas

The first and second chapters of the Gospel of St. Luke contain three great expressions of praise and exultation, of which the first is from the lips of the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord. After having been told of the angelic messenger of her appointed blessedness by being the mother of the Son of God, she breaks into joyous praise, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," which is the first Doxology of the New Testament.

Here is a simple peasant woman who has been informed of her role in God's purposes of redemption; and, accordingly, she breaks forth into praise and exultation. Why all this happiness? What does it take to bring joy and happiness to your life? Gifts? Good Health? Possessions? Prestige? Influence? Praise of friends and approval? Sense of accomplishment? What really makes your heart rejoice?

Mary, the Angelic Hosts, the hillside shepherds, all gave praises because of the "Greatest Story Ever Told!" - that of the high privilege of God's salvation made available for each of us. Over and over again the New Testament Holy Writers give voice to praise because of God's Salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the real meaning of Christmas. Anyone who misses this Truth is not experiencing Christmas, He's just observing it - looking on. Today as in the yesteryear, we are caught up in the drama of Redemption; therefore, let us not lose the wonder of it all.

Mel Dixon - Interim Pastor, United Methodist Church

Christmas Peace-Frenzy

The Christmas season, with its extremes of frantic preparation and quiet meditation, is not unique to our culture. Occasionally we hear of the interesting customs of other lands. I grew up with an Advent calendar called "Christmas Around the World." Each day from December 1 to 24, we opened a little door to learn one of the way Christmas is celebrated in another country. I still have that Advent calendar, and I take great joy in trying to remember what lies behind each little door before I open it.

As many of you know, I had the privilege of traveling in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union last summer. Our group met with Christians wherever we went, and we made many friends. I've been thinking about them frequently during this holy season of Advent. I know we are hearing the same scriptures of the prophets, the gospel accounts of John the Baptist, as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ once again. I can imagine them singing the beautiful carols of Christmas in their own languages, their faces glowing with joy in the candlelight.

The other day I received a Christmas card from Anne-Kathrin, one of my friends in East Germany. She is a delightful young lady who knows the cost and joy of being a Christian in a socialist society. In her letter she describes the bustle of the Christmas rush in the cities - she complained about the hubbub just as we do. Her Christmas wish was for "Peace to all." I know she means that in the most far-reaching sense as well as the most personal.

I have ceased being surprised, but I'm still delighted to discover still more commonalities with the people of Eastern Europe and the USSR. I invite you to remember these brothers and sisters in your prayers and meditations, this season and throughout the year.

Cathy Barker, Ione United Church of Christ

Angels Still Sing, also Weep

If the angels who sang at our Lord's birth were to hover over our land today, what do you think their reaction would be? Would they sing or weep? Or do both?

I think it would be both. Sing, because peace on earth and goodwill towards men is still God's message to mankind. The God who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" has not changed. The passing of 2000 years has not diminished that love one iota. Not only angels, but men can sing about that.

Cry, because 2000 years have passed and peace on earth is not a reality, goodwill towards men is not a fact. Cry, because the merchants of our land moaned the fact that Thanksgiving came late, hence there was less time for the commercialization and exploitation of Christmas. Because "getting" still overshadows "giving." Not only angels, but men should weep over that.

Ultimate peace and goodwill will only be realized when that Babe born so long ago returns as King as kings and Lord of lords. Until then let us individually and collectively be sure our energies and efforts promote that cause for which our Savior came and about which the angels sang.

Don Reiber - Seventh-day Adventist

Find Peace through the Source

The world hasn't changed much in the last two thousand years. That is, at least, in the things for which men are seeking. The angels appeared to the shepherds on the hillside and declared, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men." The world was searching for peace then as unfruitfully as now.

The message of Christmas is a message about the secret to attaining peace on earth. The angels declared His birth, Isaiah the prophet foretold it in chapter 9:6 when he called Him "Prince of Peace." It was this small child lying in a manger that was to become the source of peace for mankind.

Men may search all they want, hold all the summits they want, conduct all the arms control meetings and sign peace treaties, but the truth is, they will not find peace. They will not find peace because they have left the most crucial element in the equation out. They are forgetting the source of peace - the child called the Prince of Peace. Until He is brought to the throne of people's lives, peace will be a mere illusion, and an unattainable dream.

May this be the Christmas that men finally see in this child of the manger He who was born to bring peace on earth. May the peace of Christ richly dwell upon each of you in this Christmas season.

Don Shelton, minister - First Christian

CELEBRATE!

May the magic of Christmas bless one and all with the spirit of brotherhood and unity.

**M&R
FLOOR COVERING**

CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS

May the warmth and spirit of the holiday season be yours

Murray's Drug

Good Tidings of GREAT Joy

Guided by a STAR, THE WISE MEN CAME TO BETHLEHEM TO WORSHIP AND REJOICE. Today, MANKIND TURNS AGAIN TO THE MANGER, TO FIND PEACE AND BLESSINGS.

May your CHRISTMAS joys be BOUNTIFUL.

The Heppner
GAZETTE-TIMES
676-9228

Sandy, Eileen, Joyce, Marcy, Denise, Maryann, Rusty, David, Bonnie, Ellen, Delpha, Mary, Justine, Mike, Ashley, Dana, Eric.