

### KEEPING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

I love the Christmas season. I enjoy everything that comes with it. I appreciate the opportunity to give something special to the people I love. It would do all of us well to remember that it is not the size of the gift, but rather the love behind the gift that really matters. One Christmas season our family was hard pressed financially. I had only enough money for a small gift to give my wife after we had purchased our gifts for the children. This seemingly insignificant gift has been the one present she has cherished even above nicer gifts presented to her when we able to afford more.

I enjoy the traditions that go with Christmas -- the tree, the wreath, the decorations, the songs and the stories. I will always hold dear to my heart Dickens' A Christmas Carol. I also enjoy the newer Christmas stories such as Polar Express. One year one of my grandsons, at his bequest, sat down beside me on the sofa and we watched it from beginning to end, twice in a row. What I liked best was his presence that came with the movie. Which reminds us of another beautiful thing about Christmas and that is family reunions. It is a beautiful time to get together.

From the Christian worldview, what we like most about Christmas is Christ! A ridiculous advertisement put out by atheists on Time's Square boasts, "Who needs Christ at Christmas?" In their pathetic ad, they crossed out the name "Christ" but left the name "Christ" in the word "Christmas." Of course they did! Because you cannot have Christmas without Christ. Christmas is all about Christ. We exchange gifts with one another to remind us that God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten son. I intend to always be fanatical about lifting up Jesus on His birthday! Let's enter the Christmas season this morning with the beginning of the Christmas story. Please observe:

#### **1. The Plans We Don't See**

*"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth" (Luke 1:26).* Six months earlier Gabriel had come to Zacharias and saying his barren wife, Elisabeth would give birth to John the Baptist. He said he and his wife would have joy and gladness and many would rejoice at their child's birth. John would be great, separated from this world and be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Many would turn to the Lord and Luke 1:17 says, *"And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* Being six months the senior of his cousin, the Lord Jesus Christ, John would make ready the people for Jesus. John recognized this as his mission. In his personal ministry he said, *"...One mightier than I*

*cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose..." (Luke 3:16). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).*

Before Jesus was born, God was planning and making everything ready. Many times we don't see the whole picture of God's plans for us. But rest assured that God has made plans. He promises, *"And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed"* (Deuteronomy 31:8).

## **2. The Path We All Should Take**

*"To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary"* (Luke 1:27). Mary was as pure as the driven snow. We should always remember that God is a great forgiver. He delights to show mercy. When God has a special mission that will affect multitudes, he most often takes that person who has been unscathed by the world's sins and their horrid effects. When he saves a world from starvation, he chooses a pure man full of dreams, Joseph, son of Jacob. When he wants a testimony in the fiery furnace and lion's den he chooses Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel. The Bible says, *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank..."* (Daniel 1:8). John the Baptist was of the same ilk. God values a moral person. A woman who is holy is compared to a rare treasure: *"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies"* (Proverbs 31:10). God is looking for that person who has kept himself pure to do something great for Him. Paul said, *"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (II Timothy 2:20,21). The word "meet" in Greek is *eujcrhstoß* (euchreæstos) which means, "easy to make use of, useful." Let this be a challenge for all of us to be vessels meet for the Master's use.

## **3. The Pronouncement We Should All Desire**

The Bible says, *"And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God"* (Luke 1:28-30). Mary was highly favored and blessed of God. It just doesn't get any better than that! Favor is God's gifted benefits bestowed upon an individual. It comes from the Greek word: *caçriß* (charis), which means, "graciously gifted." Even though Mary's lifestyle pleased God, the fact that she could carry the Christ-child is a gift of grace. Paul said, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"* (I Corinthians 15:10). Oh, for more of God's grace!

#### 4. The Prenatal Promise Disclosed.

*“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end”* (Luke 1:31-33). A miracle is promised: Mary would conceive without the help of a man! *“...For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man”* (Jeremiah 31:22). We could only be delivered from the troubled, fallen world in which we live if God would come to earth and redeem us. *“Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man”* (Psalm 60:11).

#### 5. The Power Released

*“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her”* (Luke 1:34-38). When Mary said *“...be it unto me according to thy word...”* (Luke 1: 38) she was not using the word  $\Lambda\omicron/\omicron\omicron\beta$  (Logos), meaning the emphatic Word recorded in the canon of Scripture. The Bible says that all the Scripture *“...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (II Timothy 3:16). The word for “word” that Mary used was  $\rho\eta\upsilon\mu\alpha$  (rheōma,) which means, “that which is or has been uttered by the living voice a thing spoken.” This is a specific word given to a specific person for a specific purpose. This word of the promised virgin birth was given to no one else other than to Mary. This is a one time only occurrence; it never happened before and it shall never happen again. And when Mary said, *“...be it unto me according to thy word...”* (Luke 1:38b), she was releasing herself to the power of God that was released within her. This was the gift of Christmas: Jesus. He really is the reason for the season! *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”* (II Corinthians 9:15).

