

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO YOU?

Every great or significant day ought to stand for something true for all the days. Christmas does not stand alone. It emphasizes truths and sentiments valid for every day in the year.

The spell of Christmas is falling again upon our world. "There is born unto you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord," is the way in which the angel announced the fact to the shepherds. That is a record of what happened more than nineteen hundred years ago. It was heralded by the song of the heavenly choir over the hills of Bethlehem, and that sweet music is heard again today, in anthem and sermon the world around, as men pay homage to the fact of Christ and the lowly manger in Bethlehem.

The Christmas message is that a Babe was born in Bethlehem more than nineteen hundred years ago. When Christ was born he was only a Babe, but never did such a babe appear in this world before nor since.

Heavenly enthusiasm at the birth of Christ took the form of a mighty swelling chorus, sung by a choice, angelic host, marshalled for the sole purpose of announcing to the world the delight of the Heavenly Father, that the time had come when he was fulfilling the glorious and age-old promise of the Deliverer. Joy was the initial note of the gospel and the key-note of all its music.

Perhaps the world had never reached such a low ebb of human happiness as when Christ entered it. The common people were victims of oppression, cruelty, fear and despair. All religions had lost their vitality. The ruling classes were plunged into pleasure seeking and self-indulgence. "Ben Hur" depicts the dreaded galley, the horrors of crucifixion, and the slavery of paganism.

It is no wonder that the angels sang on the first Christmas night for something new and wonderful had taken place. Hopes long cherished had been fulfilled. The long centuries during which Israel had looked for a deliverer had reached their climax and the Messiah had come. Then the angel's song burst forth because Heaven had responded to the cry for salvation and craving for light. The angels sang because God had come to men. This was the marvel of that night. Nothing greater could have happened. From His throne on high, God stooped to man's estate. Henceforth, he was to be "Emmanuel, God with us." Other messengers had come through the long centuries but this was God Himself, born of woman, clothed in flesh, that he might show men how to live and set them free from the power of sin. It was "amazing condescension, abandonment sublime". The angels knew this and so they sang. They sang because God came in a way that men could understand; also because His purpose in coming was to show men the way back to God. He came as a Saviour to deliver men from their sins.

When the angels sang their first Christmas carol into the listening ears of men whose hearts were uplifted by the heavenly anthem, they brought first into concrete expression the idea that God is not only above us and beyond us and over us, but that he is with us. With the birth of the babe and the song of the angels there came into the hearts of men the encouragement of an eternal hope, the inspiration of all heavenly visions, the symphonizing of all life with the divine, and the consequent and attendant strength for every struggle along with the reward for all labors.

Christmas celebrates not alone the birth of the babe of Bethlehem, but the birth of the spirit of good will among men. Peace on earth is the gift of the new-born Saviour himself. Good-will among men is the outcome of the good pleasure of God among men. Christmas then witnesses not alone the incarnation of a person but the incarnation of an idea also. The Person gives to the earth a concrete conception of God. The idea becomes the expression of the attitude of God toward men. Christmas brings an annual reminder of God as intimate as the home and as transcendent as the heavens.

We cannot measure Christmas by the trees that are decorated, the parties that are enjoyed, the carols that are sung, or by the exchange of love's greetings. Christmas will be your treasure or your tragedy. Misinterpreted, it will prove to be for you only the shattered alabaster box of a fading dream of pleasure. Rightly understood, it will become to you the sweet ointment filling the house of your life with the fadeless fragrance of an abiding faith in One who abides with us as Saviour, Redeemer and Lord.

To each of us Christmas brings a different message. It speaks to some, as the angels did to Mary, a message of great joy. It was the fond hope of every devout Jewish woman that she might be the mother of the promised Messiah, and to Mary this honor came.

It speaks to some of joy. It carries to others peace. It tells others the way of eternal life. To still others it only suggests selfish enjoyment, the receiving of gifts, the indulging the appetite. That most people have an entirely wrong conception of the meaning of Christmas is quite apparent from the way they observe it. Many think of Christmas as a time to make money, to gormandize, to drink liquor, and to otherwise gratify the desires of the flesh. This is a miserably poor way to celebrate the birth of Him who was born in a manger, who lived in poverty, who was reared in obscurity, who died on a cross, and Who was buried in a tomb that belonged to another. Certainly noise-making, drunkenness, revelings, and such like are utterly at variance with the spirit of the best man who ever lived, Whose birthday we celebrate on Christmas Day. These should have no place in the Christian's Christmas.

What message is this Christmas bringing to you?

1. It speaks to us of the fleetness of time.
Each Christmas is like the passing of a milestone of life. There is much work for me to do; there is much work to be done for others. The Christmas message is one as to the need of haste. "The night cometh when no man can work." We pass the years as an express train glides by telegraph poles. When each one is passed, it lies back there beyond recall. It is the same with the opportunities we let slip. The Christmas season tells us of neglected opportunities and urges the importance of faithfulness in the future.
2. It tells us of the new gifts God still wishes to give us.
He has given His Son as the Saviour of men, the great Christmas gift to the world. He has given Him also as our personal Saviour. But God has more gifts yet for us if we will receive them. He wants to give us a deeper and more abiding sense of His presence. He wants to give us power to overcome sin. He wants to give us greater success in work for Him. He wants to give us more joy and gladness as His followers. He has many things yet to give us if we are ready to receive them, and this Christmas comes as a message telling us of the blessings He still holds out for us to take.
3. It tells us how Christ would like to have Christmas observed.
I am sure that He would not lessen in any degree the mirth of children, but he would have us think a little more kindly of others, forgive all who have wronged us, (speak somewhat more gently to our loved ones,) remember generously the poor, the friendless, all less favored than we, and do all in our power to spread the good news of His coming and to promote the wideness of His reign in the world.

Let us make this the best Christmas we have ever seen. Let us crowd hate and its kindred, suspicion and gloom, out of our hearts. Let us focus our eyes on that guiding star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode, and in the warmth of its glow rekindle in ourselves the genial flame of charity. Let us, for the day at least, forget the things that annoy us. In their places let us substitute thoughts of the many things for which we may be thankful.

Let us properly celebrate the birthday of the incomparable Christ. He is incomparable for numerous reasons. He was born contrary to the laws of life. He lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; that was during His exile in childhood.

He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous, uninfluential, and had neither training nor education. In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled the doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon billows as if pavements, and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His service. He never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the song writers combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. He never practiced medicine, and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near. He never marshalled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun, and yet no leader ever had more volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot being fired.

Every seventh day the wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wend their way to worshipping assemblies to pay homage and respect to Him. The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more. Though time has spread 1900 years between the people of this generation and the scene of His crucifixion yet He still lives. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him.

He stands forth on the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by demons, as the living, personal Christ, our Lord and Saviour.