

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:1-20

Joseph and Mary were engaged, but not married. Among the Jews in that day, it was customary for a couple to be engaged for twelve months before marriage. This period, during which Joseph and Mary were looking forward to their coming nuptials, was a time gilded by many bright hopes of future happiness. The tie of betrothal was as sacred as that of marriage, and infidelities before marriage were considered as sinful as those following marriage, and death by stoning was the punishment for such sins.

It was a terrible shock to Joseph when he was informed that Mary was to become a mother. His trial was most painful because he did not know that the Holy Ghost was responsible for her condition. Naturally Joseph thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him. His suspicions were natural, but they must have cruelly wounded the tender heart of Mary. Regardless of what Joseph thought, Mary was conscious of her innocence.

Being a just, merciful, and religious man Joseph wanted to do what was right. The law permitted him to have her stoned, but his genuine love for Mary constrained him to do otherwise. Our hearts are touched by Joseph's tenderness and considerateness. We admire him for his determination to do what was right, and to do it in a kind manner.

While Joseph thought seriously and prayerfully about what he should do, an angel appeared unto him in a dream and delivered to him a message from the Lord as to what he should do. When the angel proclaimed the fact that, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost," Joseph was convinced and his heart was filled with gratitude for the revelation from God.

Concerning the yet unborn Child, Joseph was informed as to His birth, His name, and His mission. God's Son was coming to route out and to destroy the diseases of the souls of men and to give them perfect spiritual health, and to bring eternal life to all who would receive Him as a personal Saviour.

In obedience to the command of the angel, Joseph was united in marriage with Mary, most likely in a private wedding, due to the circumstances.

Just before the birth of the Lord Jesus, Joseph and Mary were in Nazareth, some sixty miles north of Bethlehem. In order that they might be in the proper place at the right time, God caused Caesar Augustus to issue a decree that all the world over which he had control should be enrolled, everyone in his own city, with a view to taxation and perhaps military service. In response to this decree, Joseph and Mary made their way to Bethlehem. Late one afternoon, they arrived at the only inn which Bethlehem could claim as its own. That inn was seldom filled with guests, but on this particular occasion it was filled to capacity. When not even an improvised corner could be found in the inn to shelter and protect the expectant mother, Joseph was almost frantic, and doubtless Mary was more so. Finally the innkeeper told Joseph that he and Mary might stay in the stable, if they desired to do so. As a last resort Joseph and Mary entered the stable, and there she gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was cradled in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn." Lack of hospitality was the experience of our Lord

throughout His earthly ministry. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The masses of people through the centuries have never had room for Christ. Do you have room for Him in your thoughts, your reading, your conversation, or your life?

While the lowly shepherds in the Judean hills were watching over their flocks and protecting them from robbers and wild beasts, they were visited by an angel of the Lord. As the glory of the Lord shone round about this heavenly messenger the shepherds were frightened, as most anyone would have been under the circumstances. Seeking to calm the shepherds, the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The angel gave them a sign by which they might recognize the Saviour -- "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Those humble shepherds were fortunate in hearing the beautiful singing of the angels on that never-to-be-forgotten night. They sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Having gone to the stable in Bethlehem and gazed upon the Saviour in person, and having heard the angels sing their carols, the shepherds rejoiced in their opportunity of proclaiming to others who were less fortunate than they the good news about what they had seen and heard. They rejoiced because they had seen the One Who was to bring so many and such wonderful blessings to the peoples of the world.

It is truly wonderful that there have been those who were willing to receive Christ, and who as a result of doing so have become instruments in God's hands of great service and blessing. On the other hand, there have been those who refused to admit. They have maintained an attitude of supreme indifference to His claims upon them. They should have made room for Christ in that inn, even if it had been necessary to remove all others in order to do so, but they did not do it. Likewise, every one of us should make room for Christ in our lives no matter who else or what else must go.

We do not deliberately shut Christ out of our lives. We are not necessarily hostile or unkind to the One Whom God has sent to save us from sin and to give unto us eternal life. It is just that our lives are so filled with things, and our interests are so varied and numerous. We do not really mean to shut Him out, but we do it anyway. We reserve the best we have for ourselves and our selfish interests, and we send the Son of God to the stable or elsewhere. We fool nobody, much less do we deceive God, when we say that we don't have time to pray, to read God's Word, to attend church services, to perform deeds of kindness and helpfulness for others, and to render some significant service for Christ in and through the church.

What is the spirit of Christmas?

I. The Spirit Of Happiness.

Everybody has a desire to be happy. Each one is striving for happiness. Many never achieve happiness although it is desired and pursued. Happiness does not consist in what one has, but rather in what He is. Happiness comes through salvation from sin, submission to Christ, service for Christ, and sharing with others.

II. The Spirit Of Love.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." God loved and He gave.

III. The Spirit Of Good Will.

There is always a lovely spirit abroad at Christime. Unfortunately, we live to and for ourselves far too much, and only now and then do we stop to think of the other person. We forget that all of us are human, made of the same flesh and blood, warmed by the same sun, chilled by the same cold, hurt by the same wounds, subject to the same temptations, grieved by the same sorrows, and cheered by the same joys. We all belong to the human family.

Christmas is a time when we are more apt to give ourselves over to good will. Most of us try to do something for someone else. Old friends are recalled, greetings are exchanged, toys are prepared for children. Christmas baskets are provided for the poor. There is no season of the year when people seem so anxious to do something for someone else.