

Christmas: The Wise Still Seek Him

Introduction

Christmas can be one of two extremes; a time of joy and remembrance of days of yesterday, or perhaps a time of agonizing grief because of an external and internal emptiness caused by a bereavement. Beneath all the glitter and carol singing, the charade of joy and carefree appearances, there are empty and breaking hearts, and eyes wet with tears.

What can we learn from Christmas that will lift our spirits in this world of sorrow, that will give hope for tomorrow, and that in the darkest of days will give comfort? To answer this I consider the following:

God told the ancient Israelites how they could approach Him and secure acceptability. It would be by an offering which could be a bullock (Lev. 1:5), a sheep or goat (Lev. 1:10), or two little birds (Lev. 1:14). For our Christmas message we observe the distinction between the birds and the other sacrifices. The earth was the natural habitat of the bulls, sheep and goats, but not for the bird whose natural habitat was to “fly above the earth in the open firmament of Heaven” (Gen. 1:20). From this observation I see a lovely truth. Before the little bird could ever be offered in sacrifice it had to leave its natural habitat, the “open firmament of heaven”, and come down to where sinful man lived. A lovely picture of the condescension and incarnation of Christ.

The coming of the Lord into this world is only half the story. The other half is how the world was prepared for the coming of the Lord. That preparation was brought about by the positive and negative education and experiences of the Jewish and heathen people.

Preparation Through The Education and Experiences of The People of The Jewish World

| Positive | Negative |
|--|---|
| <p>Through the dispersion of the Jewish people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Synagogues were built. b) The scriptures were translated into Greek. c) The faith in the singularity of God. d) In a world of darkness they maintained: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) A religious consciousness ii) Religious worship iii) A fervency for the scriptures | <p>The inadequacy of the sacrificial system: for its:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The sacrifices could never: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Remove the burden of a guilty conscience. ii) Take away sins. iii) Deal with the subject of my sinful nature. iv) Permit all the redeemed to come to God. v) Give the power of new life to the offerer. vi) Satisfy the claims of the Holy God. b) Those sacrifices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Never knew that which they were doing. ii) Died but they never suffered for sins. iii) Brought sins to remembrance. c) The law: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Demanded 100% perfection. ii) Showed how incapable man was to succeed. |

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| Positive | Negative |
|---|----------|
| <p>Summarized:</p> <p>a) Judaism was a religion of:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">i) Dead works</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">ii) Carnal commandments</p> <p>b) It degraded into:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">i) Legalistic formalism as seen in the Pharisees, but it was dead and could never give life.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">ii) Pessimistic skepticism as seen in the Sadducees, but it was dead and could never give life.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">iii) Spiritual mysticism as seen in the Essences, but it was dead and could never give life.</p> | |

Preparation Through The Education and Experiences of The Peoples of The Heathen World

| World Power | Positive | Negative |
|----------------|---|--|
| Egypt | <p>a) Learning and higher education, the great library at Alexandria.</p> <p>b) In the scientific world, the brilliance of their embalming process.</p> <p>c) In the building world, the erecting of the pyramids and Obelisks.</p> <p>d) It was a magnificent world.</p> | <p>a) Inward peace with God.</p> <p>b) A conscience cleared from the guilt of sin.</p> <p>c) Assurance of life after death.</p> <p>d) Nothing it had could ever give peace or satisfaction.</p> |
| Babylon | <p>a) The greatest of the Fine arts:</p> <p>b) Music</p> <p>c) Beautiful hanging gardens</p> <p>d) The excellency of the structure of the city</p> <p>e) The glory of its glazed tiled buildings and arches</p> | <p>a) Inward peace with God</p> <p>b) A conscience cleared from the guilt of sin</p> <p>c) Assurance of life after death.</p> <p>d) Nothing it had could ever give peace or satisfaction.</p> |
| Greece | <p>a) A magnificence of culture.</p> <p>b) The richness of its poets.</p> <p>c) The greatness of its Philosophers, Socrates; etc.</p> <p>d) The development of the human body, male and female.</p> | <p>a) Inward peace with God.</p> <p>b) A conscience cleared from the guilt of sin.</p> <p>c) Assurance of life after death.</p> <p>d) Nothing it had could never give peace or satisfaction.</p> |
| Rome | <p>a) Universal freedom to travel.</p> <p>b) Universal Peace.</p> <p>c) Spectacular arenas of fierce fighting and blood shed.</p> <p>d) Universal power.</p> <p>e) The Prestige of being a Roman.</p> | <p>a) Inward peace with God.</p> <p>b) A conscience cleared from the guilt of sin.</p> <p>c) Assurance of life after death.</p> <p>d) Nothing it had could never give peace or satisfaction.</p> |

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| World Power | Positive | Negative |
|--|----------|----------|
| <p>The heathen world was characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A people void of the true meaning of life b) Religions which could not save or satisfy c) Atheism d) Infidelity e) Polytheism f) Pantheism <p>It was a world characterized by that which the prodigal son found, taking all he had, and when he had nothing left, he felt emptied and hungry, nothing to satisfy, and no one to care in a cold selfish world.</p> | | |

There was a universal need for the Christ, and when all was fully ready, Christ was born. Paul wrote:
“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4)

For four hundred years God had been silent, and then one night to a world in spiritual darkness, an angel appeared to shepherds saying:
“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11)

Then there appeared a congregation of angels who praised God saying:
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk. 2:14)

It was a magnificent sight and a glorious message of hope. As a ray of sunshine in the midst of dark foreboding skies came this ray of light from Heaven:
“The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (Matt. 4:16)

God had spoken again. This was a beautiful message, worthy to be shouted from every mountain top.

Christ is all man needs to meet his deepest needs.
Christ alone can provide salvation and satisfaction.
Christ alone has the right to rule.
Christ alone was fully qualified to speak for God

Returning to the coming down of the Lord, we know that this was not the first time He had come down. ~~for~~ He had met with Abram in the cool of the day, He was not a human being, but had the appearance of one. Again, He came down to meet with Israel at Sinai, and there He was not in the appearance of a human being, but the tempered blaze of the glory of God. In pondering this coming down we observe there were two “steps” in it; His condescension and incarnation. What a step of condescending grace this was, especially when we consider it was spoken of Him: “Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” (Psa. 113:6). The good Samaritan got down low to lift man up. Never did anyone ever stoop as low as our Lord. He, in becoming man, did not give up nor was there diminished one iota of His deity, and in this He stands a paradox, an enigma.

He is:

- a) God is from everlasting, yet Jesus has a conception and birthday.
- b) God is omnipresent, yet Jesus was localized.
- c) God is Sovereign, yet Jesus was a Servant.
- d) God cannot die, yet Jesus died.
- e) God never wearies, yet Jesus was weary.

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- f) God never sleeps, yet Jesus slept.
- g) God cannot be tempted, yet Jesus was tempted.

The baby that was swaddled by Mary (Lk. 2:7, 12) was the Almighty God who speaking to Israel said: "I swaddled you" (Lam. 2:22; Ezek. 16:4).

Glorious is the truth:

- a) He is the "Lord from Heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47)
- b) The One of whom it says: "The Father sent the Son" (1 Jn. 4:14)
- c) He was: "A child is born, a Son is given" (Isa. 9:6)
- d) He came as:
 - i) The "Hope of Israel" (Acts 26:6)
 - ii) The "Consolation of Israel" (Lk. 2:25)
 - iii) Gods Perfect Servant (Phil. 2:7)
 - iv) God's Appointed King (Matt. 2:2)
 - v) The "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45)
 - vi) The "second man" (1 Cor. 15:47)

Incomparable are the truths, the infinite became finite, the immortal became mortal, and in so doing Christ left a world of:

- a) Unchanging perfection for a world of compromising man.
- b) Recognized worthiness for a world of shame, mockery, disbelief, and irreverence by man.
- c) Immeasurable riches for a world of poverty, hardship, low class environment for man.
- d) Peace and harmony for a world of hatred, spite, and selfishness from man.
- e) Supreme fellowship for a world of animosity and aloneness from man.
- f) Joy for a world of sorrow and grief.
- g) Praise for a world of despising.

But that is not the end of the story for Christ did something which necessitated a second bird to foreshadow (Lev. 14:53). Christ rose triumphantly from the dead and went back to Heaven.

The resurrection of Christ:

- a) Proved that Christ was the Son of God: "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).
- b) Vindicated His faith in God: "For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isa. 50:7).
- c) Was for our justification: "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).
- d) Was His crowning victory over death:
 - i) "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15)
 - ii) "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18).
- e) Was the pattern of our resurrection: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him (1 Thess. 4:13-14).
- f) It is the pledge of coming judgment for all: "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all

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men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

Christ Ascended Into Heaven

1) How did He go up?

- a) “A cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9)
- b) He was “received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16)
- c) Passing through the ranks of angelic beings of Him it is stated: “When He ascended up on high” (Eph. 4:8); “ascended up far above all heavens” (Eph. 4:10).

2) How high did He go up?

- a) “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself” (Heb. 9:24)
- b) “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens” (Heb. 4:14)
- c) “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26)
- d) “He that descended is the same also that ascended up, far above all heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10)

3) Where is He?

- a) “After Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mk. 16:19)
- b) “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth in the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1)
- c) “When he had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3)
- d) “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2)

This is the story of Christmas. The Christ who came into this world, died, rose again, and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens. Well might we sing:

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

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He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

. . . Rowan Jennings

