

Christmas, the Most Deceptive Time of the Year!

A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11)

Christmas Season is upon us, which means the word “Jesus” will be sung and heard more often than any other time of the year! If the aliens were to visit us from Mars, they may indeed conclude that this Jesus must be the founder of the planet Earth! Hence, this is perhaps the most deceptive time of the year because singing a few songs about Christ’s birth merely acts as smokescreen to a sad reality. While many of us may confess that Jesus is our Lord, we make sure that he does not change the way we live. The pollster George Gallup put it like this: “Even if religion is an important force in our lives, it is not the center of our lives. . . . Interest may be high, but commitment is often low.” The columnist McManus added: “Many of us dutifully attend church, but [we are] no less likely than our unchurched brethren to engage in unethical behavior. If religion does not produce a more ethical, loving society, something is fundamentally wrong with the way that religion is being practiced.” Regardless, many assume that everything is fine and that Jesus is with us, since we live in a nice house and our church is growing. Really?

Many years ago, as soon as I got home, my wife informed me she could not find our credit card. Unable to find it after another search, I quickly called the credit card company to cancel it and to have a new card reissued. The customer representative asked me, “So do you know whether it was stolen or lost?” As I was about to answer, I happened to place my right hand under the sofa without thinking and felt something plastic. Yes, I found the card at that very moment! So I never lost the card; I just thought I did, which is how many Christians live! What do I mean? They have been so out-of-touch with Christ (you know, once in a blue moon devotional life, erratic church attendance, entertaining-yourself-to-death lifestyle, etc.) for such a long time that none of our plans are filtered through him. So when trouble or conflict arises, it is hard to sense his presence, and soon some feel that it is God who had abandoned them, saying, “Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps 10:1).

Even the disciples who were physically with Jesus, at times acted as if they couldn’t sense his presence. “One day, a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’” (Mk. 4:37-38). Spiritualizing this event, Jesus withdrew from the activities of his disciples (thus sleeping) because they thought that the boat could be righted by their own strength without Christ’s help. Realizing their inability, they then made it sound like Jesus did not care about them! No, Jesus never left them nor ceased to care for them. When we do not put him first in our lives, it will be as if he has been lost or is “sleeping,” that is, indifferent to our predicaments! But he is right there, waiting to be sought upon and “woken up” when we call unto him in the spirit of humility and repentance.

Now, the reversal of that would be to think that one still has something, when in fact it had been

lost. It happened to Joseph and Mary when they took the boy Jesus to Jerusalem to celebrate a Jewish holiday. On their way back home, they traveled quite contentedly, thinking that “he was in their company” (Lk. 2:43-44). Realizing his absence, “they began looking for him among their relatives and friends” (Lk. 2:44^b). But Jesus wasn't there! Later, upon finding him back in Jerusalem, the first thing they said was, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you” (2:48^b), to which Jesus replied: “Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” This is as if Jesus was saying to many Christians who now feel empty and wonder where Jesus has been in their lives: “You left me; I didn't leave you. Why were you looking for me in all the wrong places (friends & families)? Did you really think that I was with you when you made that unethical deal, or when you went to that unholy place? Do you know where to find me?—in my Father's house! I can't be found anywhere else. It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer.’ So, pray.’ Then, you will see that, ‘Those who seek me find me’” (Prov 8:17^b).

Christmas is a symbolic celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, and we need to give him the kind of gift he desires. How about this? “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). So let's work on being merciful with one another and acknowledging God's goodness in our everyday conversation.

Further Reflection

1. Read Proverbs 1:22-33. Isn't that sort of scary? Thank God that's not how it ends, for the Lord always restores his affection for even the most unruly. (Read Hoses 3:1-4.) But let's not forget that we need to heed God when the window of opportunity to hear from Him is still open.
2. Read Luke 2:1-20 & Matthew 2:9-12. On the surface, the pastors brought nothing to baby Jesus while the Magi brought the best that the world can offer. On a deeper level however, don't you think that the pastors did bring something to Jesus while the finest that the Magi brought were not necessarily the material things? So what is it that they brought to baby Jesus to honor his entrance into the world? I would say it was a combination of what is imbued in Luke 21:1-4, 1 Samuel 15:22 & 2 Samuel 19:29-30.

Bible Reading

Friday: Proverbs 19 & Luke 2
Saturday: Proverbs 20 & Matthew 1-2
Sunday: Proverbs 21 & Isaiah 9